The Rise and Ruin of Locust City, an all-too-Elysium Story.

I doubt that anyone reading this is unfamiliar with **Disco Elysium**, its meteoric success and the cataclysmic fall that followed. I often think how hard being a Disco fan must be these days. All you hear about is the lawsuits, corruption, infighting, allegations of toxicity and yes, more infighting. With that in mind I hesitate to write this. After all Zaum studio's doors closed behind me a year and a half ago, why stir the pot again?

The defamatory statements my former home-studio decided to give **People Make Games** for their follow-up episode to the Disco Elysium story—great documentary by the way, I sincerely recommend

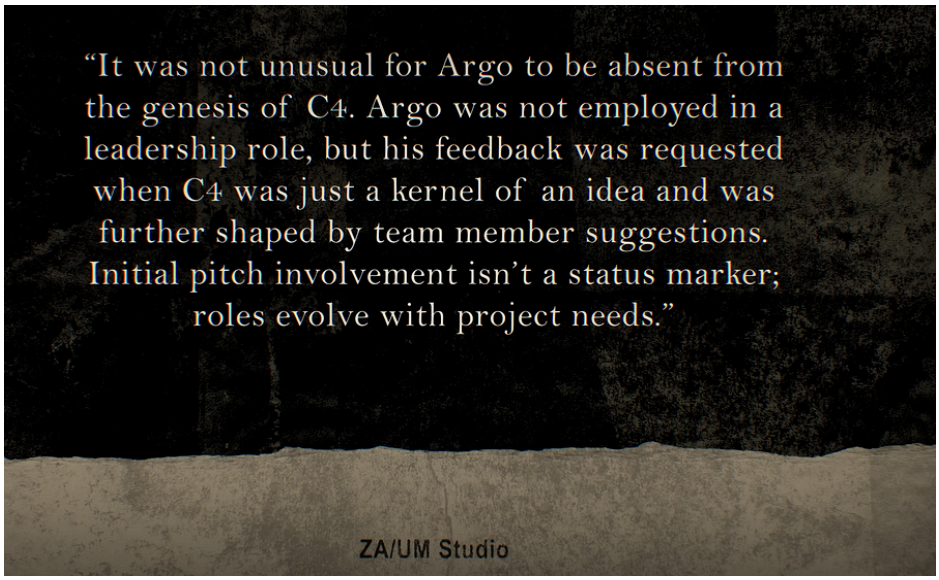
watching it—is the reason why. I want to challenge them. *Hard* and with evidence.

You see, due to rigid libel laws in the United Kingdom even the best of journalists are fairly limited in what they can and cannot cover. You either abide by these laws or you're out, it's that easy. Even for a regular Joe or Jolene it's more than a little risky to just slam all their collected evidence on the public table. If you're going against a corporate entity there's a million little ways they can lawyer-fuck you. So what can easily happen is that you spend years watching your back, collecting evidence, running everything by your trade guild representative and *still* when the hammer falls it's your word against theirs cause showcasing your evidence is a risk no one can afford to take. And the suits know that. They also know that nothing really happens if they make a false statement with zero evidence. Worst case scenario: retract the statement and make a lawyerly-worded apology. 9999 Joe-Joeline's out of 10,000 can't afford a lengthy defamation lawsuit to contest it. In fact, they can't afford the first consultation with a lawyer. Of course anyone can send out a cease & desist but if it's coming from someone who's was already making a below-average wage then you (yes, suit, you) know they can't enforce it so who gives a shit?

The studio who brought you fruity and forbidden—their words, not mine— "Collage Mode", "trust-fund tare-bag" and "What if Disco Elysium but from Temu?" has given PMG a number of false statements regarding myself and **Dora Klindžić**. In my experience, post-termination character assassinations were a disturbing pattern inside the studio, and fearing for my future **I started keeping records of my interactions in the studio all the way from early 2022.**

In order to respect your time and fit within the limitations of the medium I try to be brief and not to cram every little thing in here. In fact there's space for only the bare minimum. Where ever possible I try to protect the identities of people not involved (or minimally involved) in the shady dealings inside the studio. I do not extend the same courtesy to the upper-management and people who've been directly involved in the studio's wrongdoings or numerous coverups. Guise of 'protecting identities' is one of the most effective tools of these corporate crooks who build walls of anonymous meat around them to avoid responsibility. This ends now.

Let's go in chronological order...


"It was not unusual for Argo to be absent from the genesis of C4. Argo was not employed in a leadership role, but his feedback was requested when C4 was just a kernel of an idea and was further shaped by team member suggestions. Initial pitch involvement isn't a status marker; roles evolve with project needs."
ZA/UM Studio

In **June of 2022** studio's two newest directors, **writing director Justin Tyler Keenan** and **art director Kaspar Tamsalu**, meet with **Chief Creative Officer Kaur Kender** and his romantic partner in a hotel room in New York. In a span of a week (give or take a day or two) the quartet puts together the concept codenamed **C4**.

PMG's claim that Dora and myself were part of that trip is an honest mistake. I don't hold it against them, this story is as information dense as they come, but the truth is we were nowhere near C4's inception.

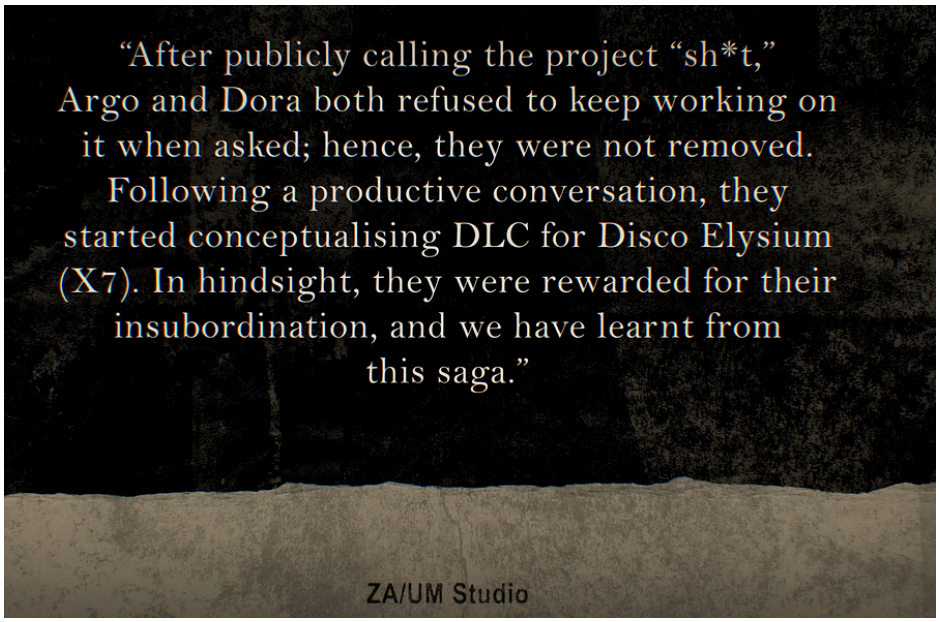
Whether it was usual 'for Argo to be absent from the genesis of C4' is questionable. Being the last remaining Disco-writer and the key-member of the **Y12 (Disco Elysium sequel) writing team** still working on the sequel while these events unfolded, I would push back on that and say that it actually *was* unusual for me to be excluded from these conversations. It is true that I was not employed in a leadership role at the time but alongside Justin and Dora I was carrying out senior duties in the Y12 writing team including conducting job interviews with the candidates for the expanding writing team. In fact the only person on what became C4 writing team that I didn't personally interview and approve was a friend Justin brought in from his college days. Great guy, good writer, I genuinely enjoyed working with him.

I'm gonna stick with 'unusual' on their first claim.

The first whiff I was given of C4 was 24h before it was announced to the entire studio over an **all-hands zoom call**. It was on a 1–1 zoom call with Justin. The whole thing lasted about 20 minutes and I was so shocked I can barely recall it. Y12 is out, C4 is in. Roll with it. Justin told me to keep it secret for 24h but gave me access to the **C4 Miro board** ahead of the next day's announcement. I didn't want to be in (further) emotional turmoil over something I can't discuss with my partner—and Justin had specifically told me not to tell Dora—so I avoided the board till the studio-wide announcement next day.

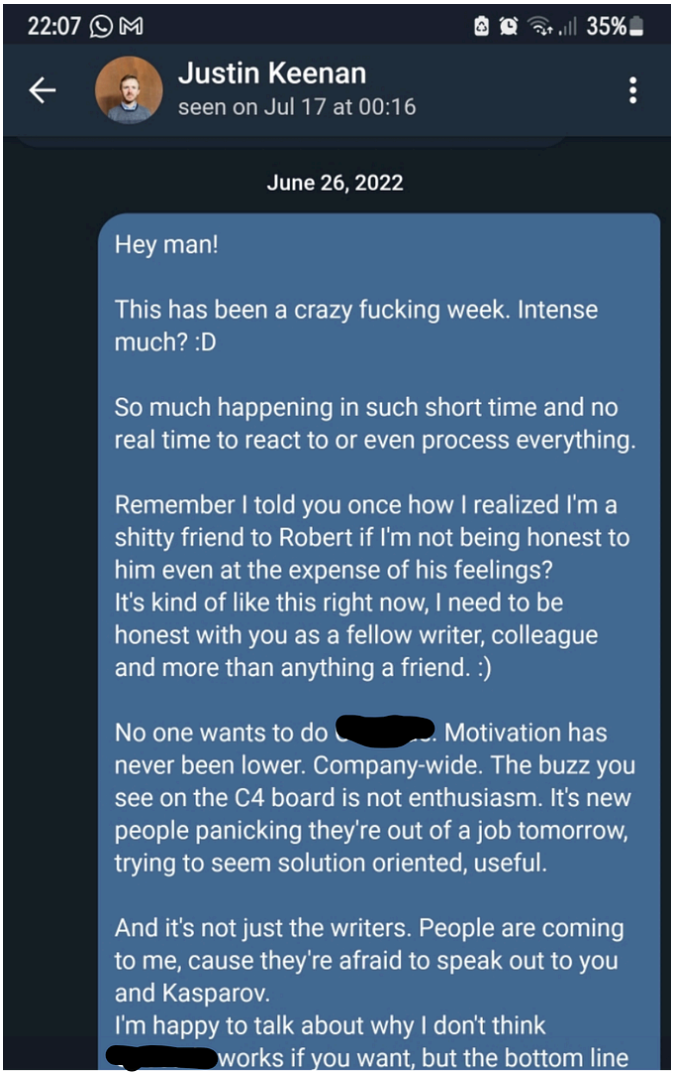
So Zaum's claim that Argo's feedback was requested when C4 was just a kernel of an idea is not inherently false. They just fail to add that so was the feedback of every other employee of the studio since the **Executive Producer Tõnis Haavel,** (who internally goes by **Denis Havel** to obscure his past criminal conviction in Estonia) specifically said in the end of the announcement zoom-call that **everyone is welcome to comment on the Miro board**. That's how confident the management was in their new project.

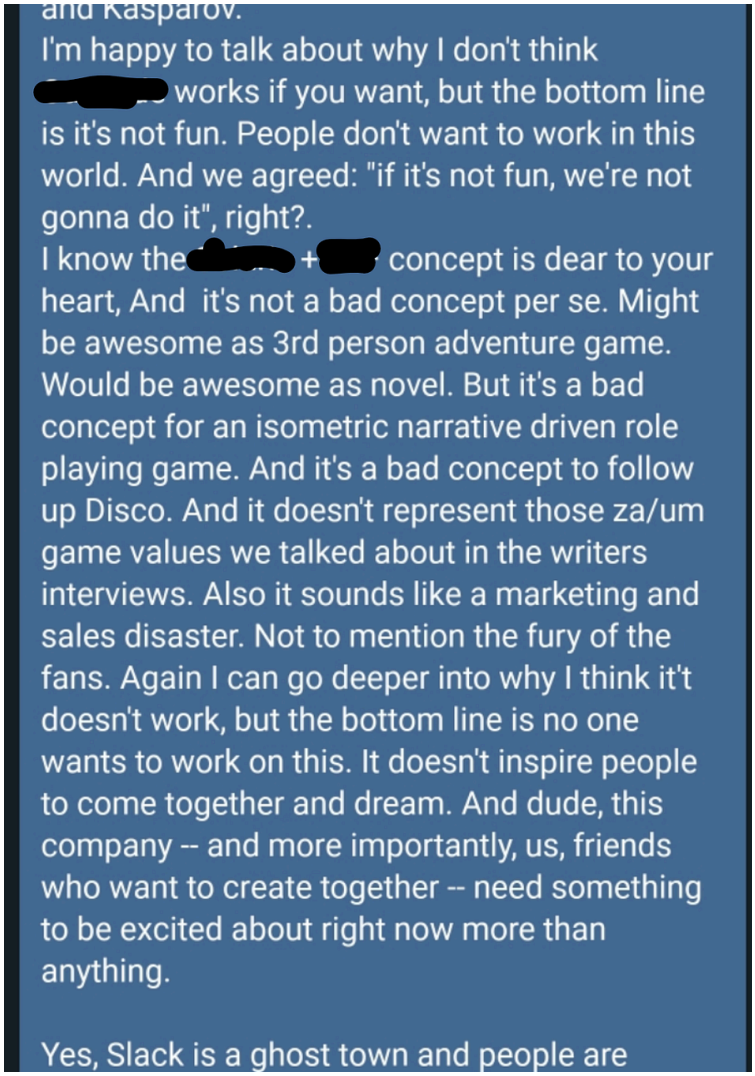
For the sake of brevity I'll skip over the chaos that unrolled due to "everyone should comment" policy on the Miro board the following week. It became unruly to say the least. People were reprimanded for expressing their opinion. **Since I was one of the most senior people in the studio and friends with Justin at the time I refrained from commenting as to not undermine his authority.** This brings us to the studio's next statement…

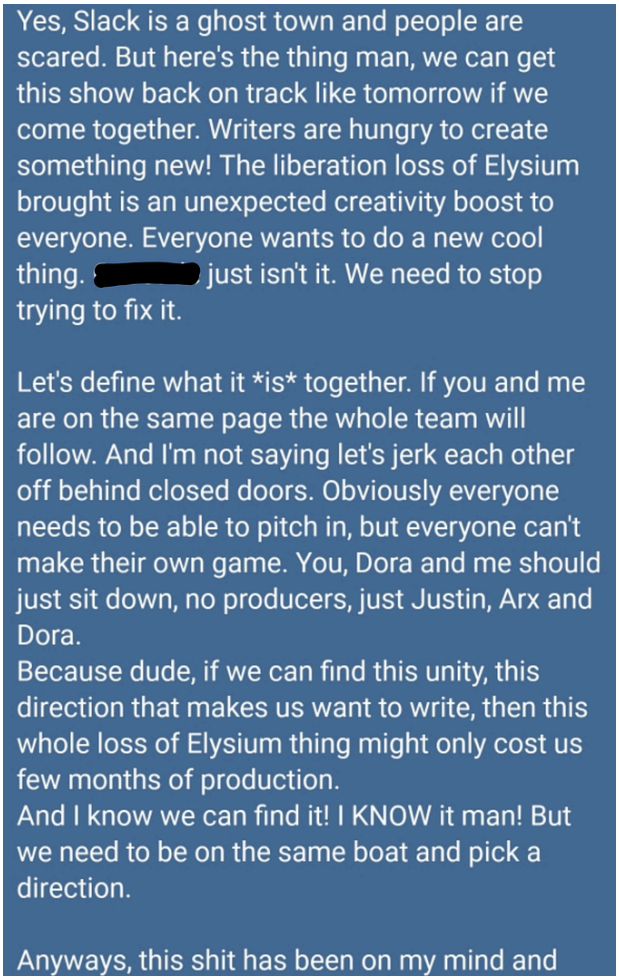

"After publicly calling the project "sh*t,"
Argo and Dora both refused to keep working on
it when asked; hence, they were not removed.
Following a productive conversation, they
started conceptualising DLC for Disco Elysium
(X7). In hindsight, they were rewarded for their
insubordination, and we have learnt from
this saga."
ZA/UM Studio

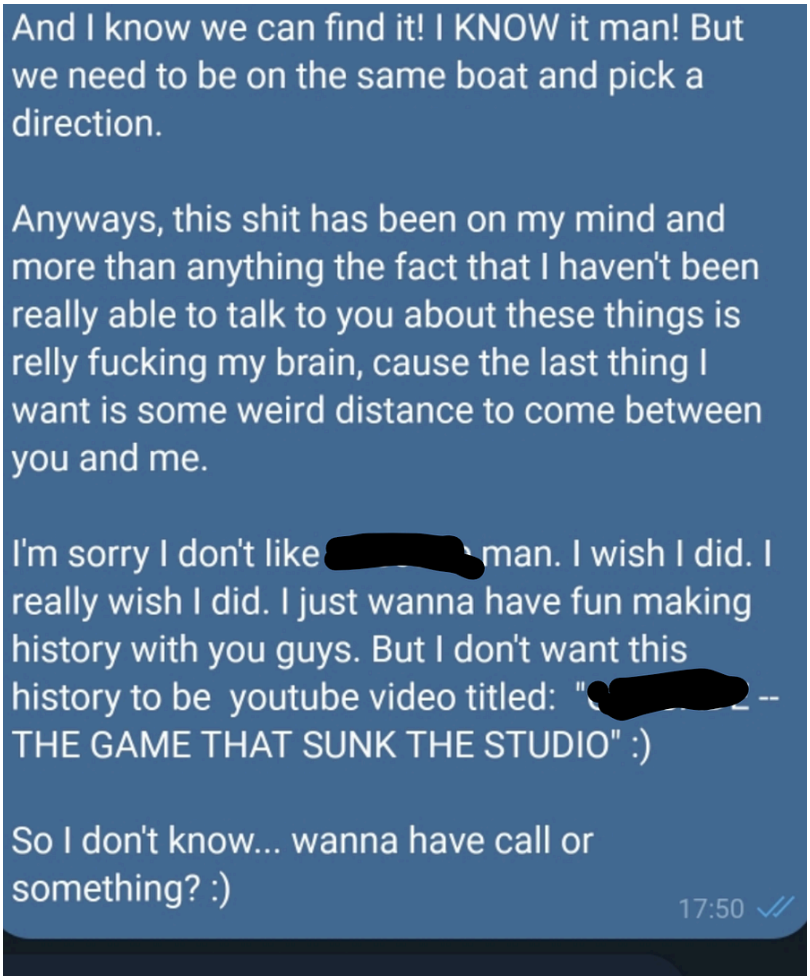
Despite having very serious quality concerns neither Dora nor myself publicly badmouthed the project. The opposite is actually true. When concerned colleagues came to us after harsh reactions to their comments on the Miro board from writing director Keenan and art director Tamsalu, we assured them we are aware of the issue and that we'll figure this out, don't worry.

A week after C4 announcement I write this to Justin in Telegram…


22:07
35%
Justin Keenan
seen on Jul 17 at 00:16
June 26, 2022
Hey man!
This has been a crazy fucking week. Intense much? :D
So much happening in such short time and no real time to react to or even process everything.
Remember I told you once how I realized I'm a shitty friend to Robert if I'm not being honest to him even at the expense of his feelings?
It's kind of like this right now, I need to be honest with you as a fellow writer, colleague and more than anything a friend. :)
No one wants to do [redacted]. Motivation has never been lower. Company-wide. The buzz you see on the C4 board is not enthusiasm. It's new people panicking they're out of a job tomorrow, trying to seem solution oriented, useful.
And it's not just the writers. People are coming to me, cause they're afraid to speak out to you and Kasparov.
I'm happy to talk about why I don't think [redacted] works if you want, but the bottom line

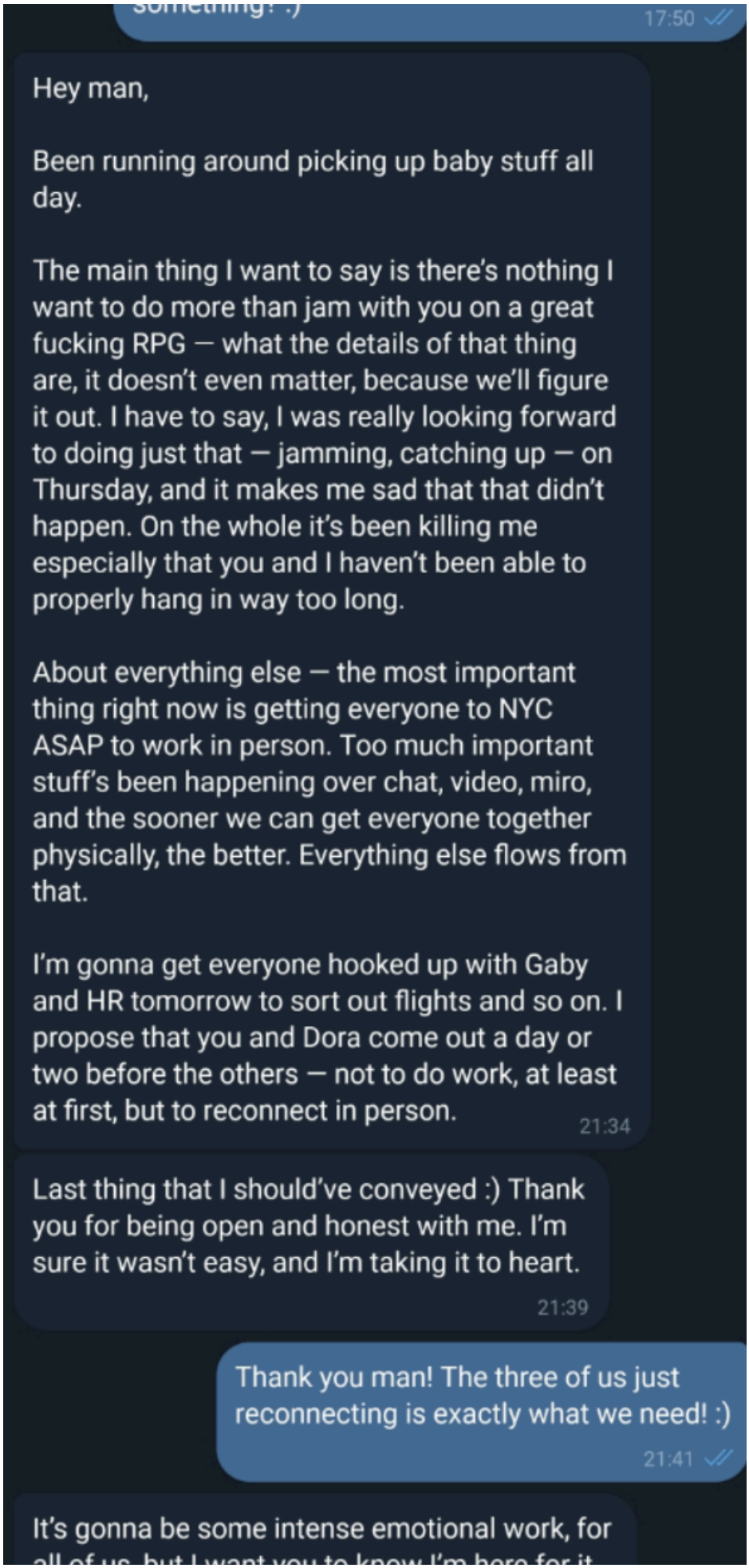

and Kasparov.
I'm happy to talk about why I don't think [redacted] works if you want, but the bottom line is it's not fun. People don't want to work in this world. And we agreed: "if it's not fun, we're not gonna do it", right?.
I know the [redacted] concept is dear to your heart, And it's not a bad concept per se. Might be awesome as 3rd person adventure game. Would be awesome as novel. But it's a bad concept for an isometric narrative driven role playing game. And it's a bad concept to follow up Disco. And it doesn't represent those za/um game values we talked about in the writers interviews. Also it sounds like a marketing and sales disaster. Not to mention the fury of the fans. Again I can go deeper into why I think it't doesn't work, but the bottom line is no one wants to work on this. It doesn't inspire people to come together and dream. And dude, this company -- and more importantly, us, friends who want to create together -- need something to be excited about right now more than anything.
Yes, Slack is a ghost town and people are

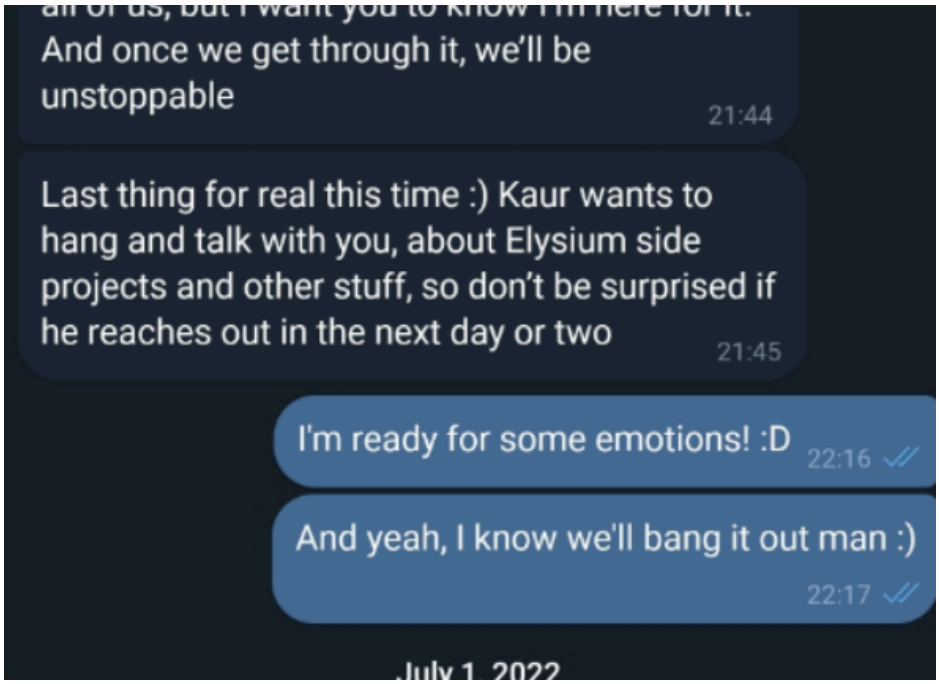

Yes, Slack is a ghost town and people are scared. But here's the thing man, we can get this show back on track like tomorrow if we come together. Writers are hungry to create something new! The liberation loss of Elysium brought is an unexpected creativity boost to everyone. Everyone wants to do a new cool thing. [redacted] just isn't it. We need to stop trying to fix it.
Let's define what it *is* together. If you and me are on the same page the whole team will follow. And I'm not saying let's jerk each other off behind closed doors. Obviously everyone needs to be able to pitch in, but everyone can't make their own game. You, Dora and me should just sit down, no producers, just Justin, Arx and Dora.
Because dude, if we can find this unity, this direction that makes us want to write, then this whole loss of Elysium thing might only cost us few months of production.
And I know we can find it! I KNOW it man! But we need to be on the same boat and pick a direction.
Anyways, this shit has been on my mind and


And I know we can find it! I KNOW it man! But we need to be on the same boat and pick a direction.
Anyways, this shit has been on my mind and more than anything the fact that I haven't been really able to talk to you about these things is relly fucking my brain, cause the last thing I want is some weird distance to come between you and me.
I'm sorry I don't like [redacted] man. I wish I did. I really wish I did. I just wanna have fun making history with you guys. But I don't want this history to be youtube video titled: "[redacted] -- THE GAME THAT SUNK THE STUDIO" :)
So I don't know... wanna have call or something? :)
17:50

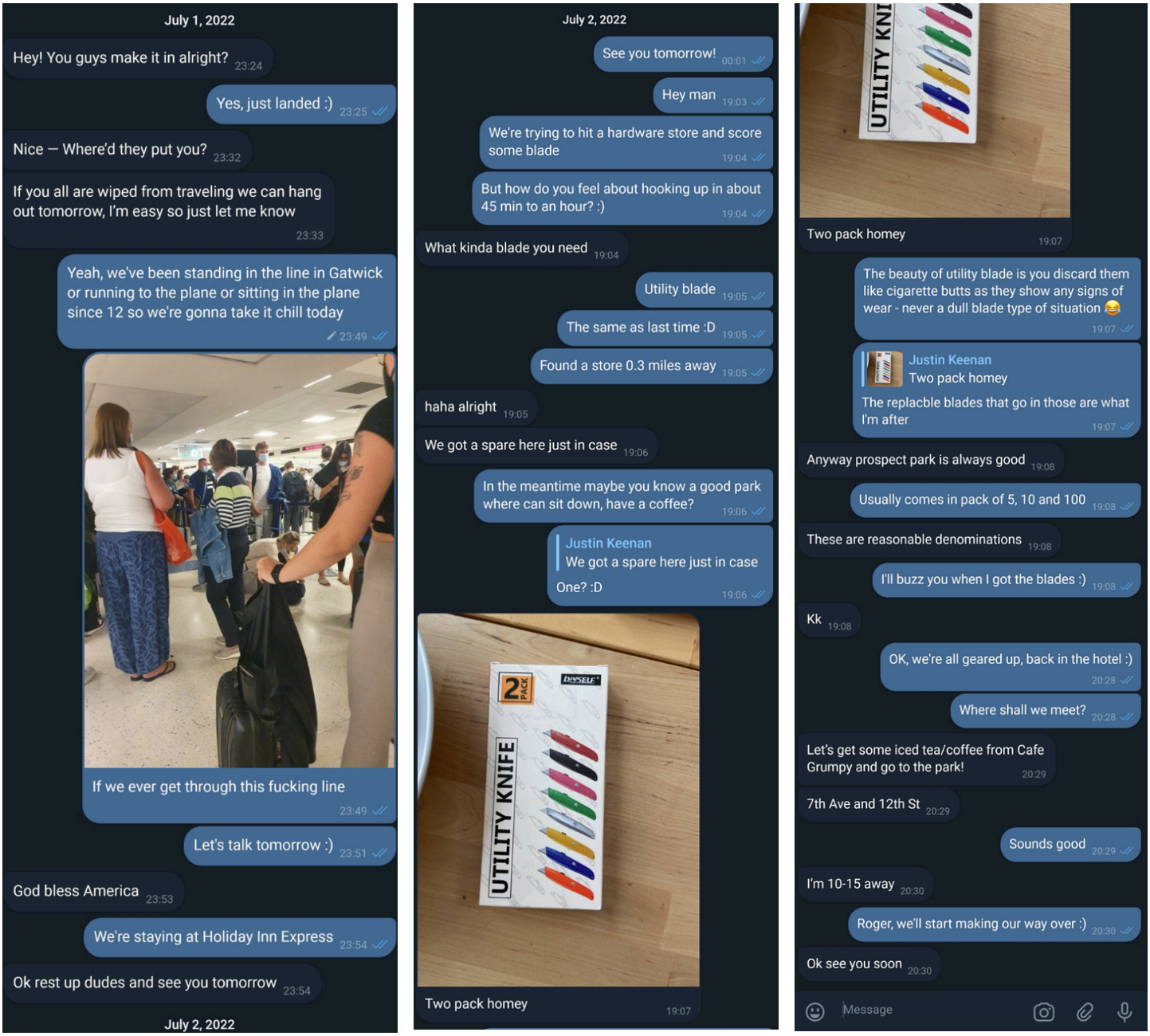
I believe the Power of Friendship is gonna disperse the clouds in 3... 2... 1..

Justin got back to me the same day with an encouraging reply...


17:50
Hey man,
Been running around picking up baby stuff all day.
The main thing I want to say is there's nothing I want to do more than jam with you on a great fucking RPG — what the details of that thing are, it doesn't even matter, because we'll figure it out. I have to say, I was really looking forward to doing just that — jamming, catching up — on Thursday, and it makes me sad that that didn't happen. On the whole it's been killing me especially that you and I haven't been able to properly hang in way too long.
About everything else — the most important thing right now is getting everyone to NYC ASAP to work in person. Too much important stuff's been happening over chat, video, miro, and the sooner we can get everyone together physically, the better. Everything else flows from that.
I'm gonna get everyone hooked up with Gaby and HR tomorrow to sort out flights and so on. I propose that you and Dora come out a day or two before the others — not to do work, at least at first, but to reconnect in person.
21:34
Last thing that I should've conveyed :) Thank you for being open and honest with me. I'm sure it wasn't easy, and I'm taking it to heart.
21:39
Thank you man! The three of us just reconnecting is exactly what we need! :)
21:41
It's gonna be some intense emotional work, for


And once we get through it, we'll be unstoppable
21:44
Last thing for real this time :) Kaur wants to hang and talk with you, about Elysium side projects and other stuff, so don't be surprised if he reaches out in the next day or two
21:45
I'm ready for some emotions! :D
22:16
And yeah, I know we'll bang it out man :)
22:17
July 1, 2022
Serious emotional work ahead. It's more like a therapy group than a writing team really.

Skipping over some more or less minor events— like art director Tamsalu coming to our house in Brighton, through the back door (why, dude?) to convince us, senior writers, that C4's story and world-building is actually very good— and jumping ahead to 1st of July. Dora and I fly out to NYC where C4's first ever f-2-f writer meetup followed by a 2-week workshop is about to go down.


July 1, 2022
Hey! You guys make it in alright? 23:24
Yes, just landed :) 23:25
Nice — Where'd they put you? 23:32
If you all are wiped from traveling we can hang out tomorrow, I'm easy so just let me know 23:33
Yeah, we've been standing in the line in Gatwick or running to the plane or sitting in the plane since 12 so we're gonna take it chill today 23:49
If we ever get through this fucking line 23:49
Let's talk tomorrow :) 23:51
God bless America 23:53
We're staying at Holiday Inn Express 23:54
Ok rest up dudes and see you tomorrow 23:54
July 2, 2022
July 2, 2022
See you tomorrow! 00:01
Hey man 19:03
We're trying to hit a hardware store and score some blade 19:04
But how do you feel about hooking up in about 45 min to an hour? :) 19:04
What kinda blade you need 19:04
Utility blade 19:05
The same as last time :D 19:05
Found a store 0.3 miles away 19:05
haha alright 19:05
We got a spare here just in case 19:06
In the meantime maybe you know a good park where can sit down, have a coffee? 19:06
Justin Keenan
We got a spare here just in case
One? :D 19:06
2 PACK
DAYSELF
UTILITY KNIFE
Two pack homey 19:07
UTILITY KNI
Two pack homey 19:07
The beauty of utility blade is you discard them like cigarette butts as they show any signs of wear - never a dull blade type of situation 19:07
Justin Keenan
Two pack homey
The replacble blades that go in those are what I'm after 19:07
Anyway prospect park is always good 19:08
Usually comes in pack of 5, 10 and 100 19:08
These are reasonable denominations 19:08
I'll buzz you when I got the blades :) 19:08
Kk 19:08
OK, we're all geared up, back in the hotel :) 20:28
Where shall we meet? 20:28
Let's get some iced tea/coffee from Cafe Grumpy and go to the park! 20:29
7th Ave and 12th St 20:29
Sounds good 20:29
I'm 10-15 away 20:30
Roger, we'll start making our way over :) 20:30
Ok see you soon 20:30
Message

These are basically the very last messages between either myself or Dora and writing director Justin Tyler Keenan in any shape or form. The only thing that follows is an official slack message Justin sends us the next morning, summoning us to a caffe where he informs us of our removal from the project.

On 2nd of July Dora and I meet with Justin in a park in NYC. It's a long and emotional meeting but we reach an agreement that despite creative disagreements we're all gonna dedicate the upcoming 2 weeks of in-person collaboration time for figuring out the C4 concept.

The next morning Justin summons us to a caffe in the neighborhood via slack-message and informs us we've been removed from the project and are being sent back home to England to face CCO Kaur

Kender. He'll decide what to do with us. The meeting only takes about 45 minutes and is awkward but friendly. In the end Justin suggests we could talk to HR (Gaby) to exchange our tickets so we could stay in NY for one more day to experience the American Independence day. We hug it out before parting ways.

More than a year later Tõnis, desperate to get rid of me, offhandedly accuses me of toxicity towards Justin. This is what I replied and I stand 100% behind it today as I did then.

On Tue, Dec 5, 2023 at 12:10 AM Argo Tuulik <argo@zaumstudio.com> wrote:

Hey Gaby and Tõnis!

Thank you for clarifying things for me Tõnis!

If you're interested in following up on the "Three months of free time..." line, Gabby, I'd be happy to have a call with you :)

There were a couple of things from our Monday morning conversation I also wanted to follow-up on :)

First we spoke about burnout and I said it is not actually the working hours that are the main factor in causing burnout. Tõnis said he doesn' believe me and I promised to send you a link to illustrate my point.

This link in Harvard Business Review was incredibly illuminating to me in understanding our own situation. It lists top 5 reasons for burnout as:

1. Unfair treatment at work
2. Unmanageable workload
3. Lack of role clarity
4. Lack of communication and support from their manager
5.Unreasonable time pressure

https://hbr.org/2019/12/burnout-is-about-your-workplace-not-your-people

In my research into burnout I collected more materials which I can share with you if you wish :)

Hope we can have a wider conversation on the topic.

Then in the earlier part of our conversation this morning Tõnis mentioned Justin and how my relationship with him was allegedly toxic. I was so surprised I didn't even think to address this at the moment. That's because up until disagreeing with the creative direction of the initial [redacted] pitch (which has since gone through two reboots and is now incorporating most of the changes Dora and I suggested) Justin and I had had a simply wonderful and a very fruitful collaboration. I dare to say we loved working with each other and my chaotic writing style had a beautiful synergy with his technical skills. I am incredibly proud of the work we did on fleshing out the critical path for Y12. Also, when Justin was offered the role of the lead writer on the team he came to me asking if I would feel okay with it. Having already suggested that Justin should take over that role to producers I told him that there's no better person for the job and I couldn't be happier with this course of events. What followed was more than six months (I would have to check my notes for the exact timeline) of wonderful partnership. I think I've said it to you, Tõnis, and I definitely wrote it in an email to Ed -- Justin Keenan is the best lead I've ever had. The last parting words we said to each other in New York were "I love you man" and "we'll work together again some day".

Furthermore, when you visited myself and Dora in our house in Brighton and we finally talked about how the events transpired on C4 and the enormous pressure under which we put together the X7 concept, you said: "You guys are so incredibly strong. I'm so sorry you had to go through this." You also apologized -- on behalf of the company I presumed. I remember this so clearly because after everything that had happened this was the first time I felt heard and understood.
I'm sure you can understand how now hearing you say that you think my relationship with Justin was toxic really does come out of the blue. Could you elaborate on that please?

We ran out of time in our meeting and barely scratched the surface of the topics we meant to cover. Didn't go deeper into the writing team challenges, the [redacted] issues, Milestone planning and you didn't even get a chance to express your thoughts on the build, Tõnis.
I've also been waiting for Jim's return to talk about unused vacation days and when would be the least disruptive time to take them. I think I have 11 unused days and as I understand, only 5 will carry over to the next calendar year? This is a conversation I should now be having with you, as the interim writing team lead, right, Tõnis?

So I think we should schedule a follow-up meeting to cover all these topics? :)

Oh yes, two more things... I apologize, but I was left a bit unclear on two matters.

First, where did we land on asking Justin and his team for their opinion on the writing quality? I think it could really help us see things more clearly. :)

And could you please give me instructions on what exactly is that list of tasks you want me to compile, Tõnis? Is it just my current open tasks? The tasks I see someone in the team needs to undertake on the writing side? Or something else? Also how would you like me to break them down? Asking to understand how granular I should get. :)
Polishing the build is still my priority for tomorrow (unless you want me to shift gears and focus on the list?) but I can get started on that list first thing Wednesday morning if you point me in the right direction :)

Have a wonderful day, both of you!

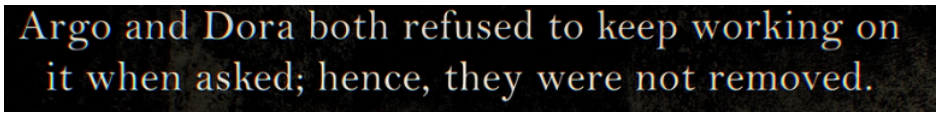
Argo

Yes, there was time when Robert and I supported Justin as the lead writer for Y12. A sort of an administrative counterpart to Robert's chaotic creativity. Satellite officer J. T. Keenan.

In his response Tõnis fires up the back-pedalo…

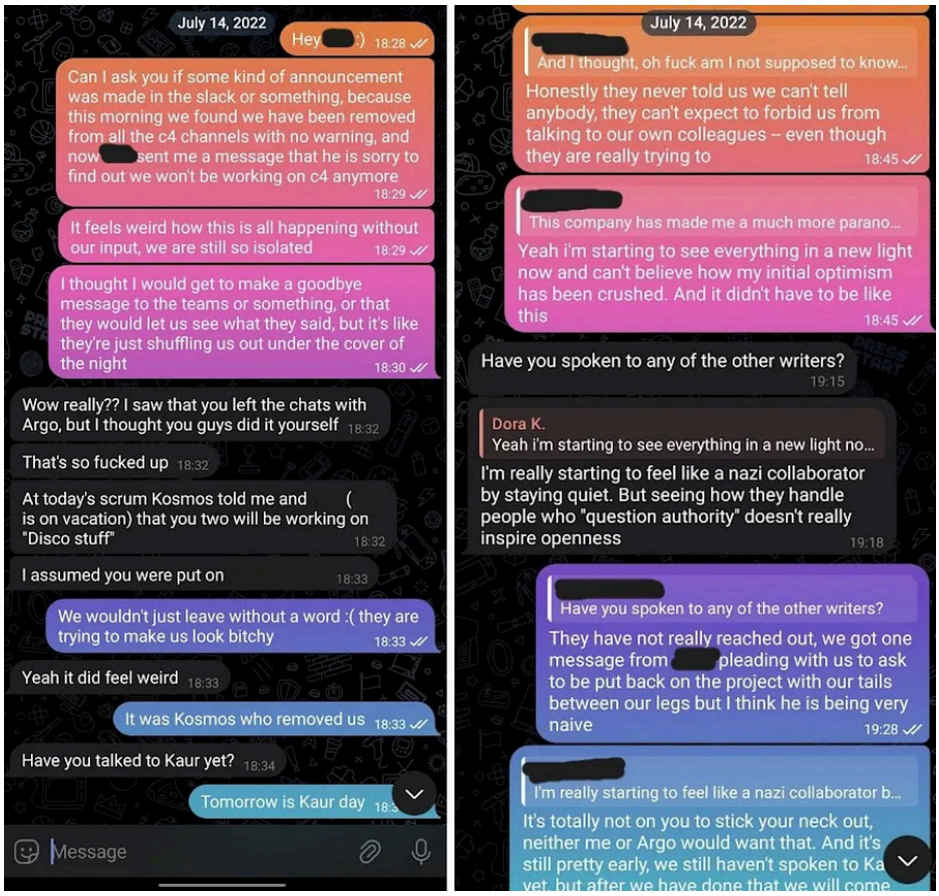
3. I am glad that you now feel good about Justin and love him. Just for the record, I said only that Jim is the third lead you are parting ways, after Justin and Chris. I hope the investigation will bring light to your relationships at the time and we can put that behind us.

Vroommm-vroooooom!!!



The above is a 100% defamatory statement and I challenge Zaum Studio to provide evidence of the contrary if they pursue spreading this garbage.

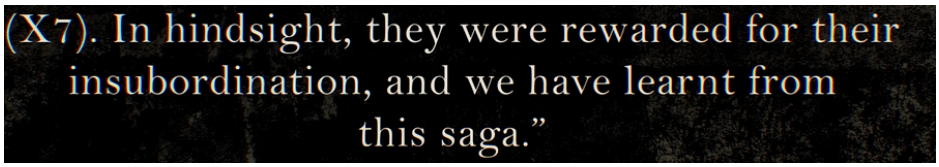
Nine days after writing director Justin Keenan REMOVES us from the C4 writing team C4's lead-producer Siim “Kosmos” Sinamäe lies to a former team member of ours that we’re “working on Disco stuff”.


July 14, 2022
Hey [redacted] 18:28
Can I ask you if some kind of announcement was made in the slack or something, because this morning we found we have been removed from all the c4 channels with no warning, and now [redacted] sent me a message that he is sorry to find out we won't be working on c4 anymore 18:29
It feels weird how this is all happening without our input, we are still so isolated 18:29
I thought I would get to make a goodbye message to the teams or something, or that they would let us see what they said, but it's like they're just shuffling us out under the cover of the night 18:30
Wow really?? I saw that you left the chats with Argo, but I thought you guys did it yourself 18:32
That's so fucked up 18:32
At today's scrum Kosmos told me and (is on vacation) that you two will be working on "Disco stuff" 18:32
I assumed you were put on 18:33
We wouldn't just leave without a word :(they are trying to make us look bitchy 18:33
Yeah it did feel weird 18:33
It was Kosmos who removed us 18:33
Have you talked to Kaur yet? 18:34
Tomorrow is Kaur day
Message
July 14, 2022
[redacted] And I thought, oh fuck am I not supposed to know...
Honestly they never told us we can't tell anybody, they can't expect to forbid us from talking to our own colleagues – even though they are really trying to 18:45
[redacted] This company has made me a much more parano...
Yeah i'm starting to see everything in a new light now and can't believe how my initial optimism has been crushed. And it didn't have to be like this 18:45
Have you spoken to any of the other writers? 19:15
Dora K. Yeah i'm starting to see everything in a new light no...
I'm really starting to feel like a nazi collaborator by staying quiet. But seeing how they handle people who "question authority" doesn't really inspire openness 19:18
[redacted] Have you spoken to any of the other writers?
They have not really reached out, we got one message from [redacted] pleading with us to ask to be put back on the project with our tails between our legs but I think he is being very naive 19:28
[redacted] I'm really starting to feel like a nazi collaborator b...
It's totally not on you to stick your neck out, neither me or Argo would want that. And it's still pretty early, we still haven't spoken to Ka

Dora's inbox: Kosmos removed us from C4 slack channels without comment. Not to us not to anyone else. We never got to say goodbye to our team (that we assembled over six months of job interviews) and even a year later when X7 was expanding we found out most of our former teammates had no idea what had happened.

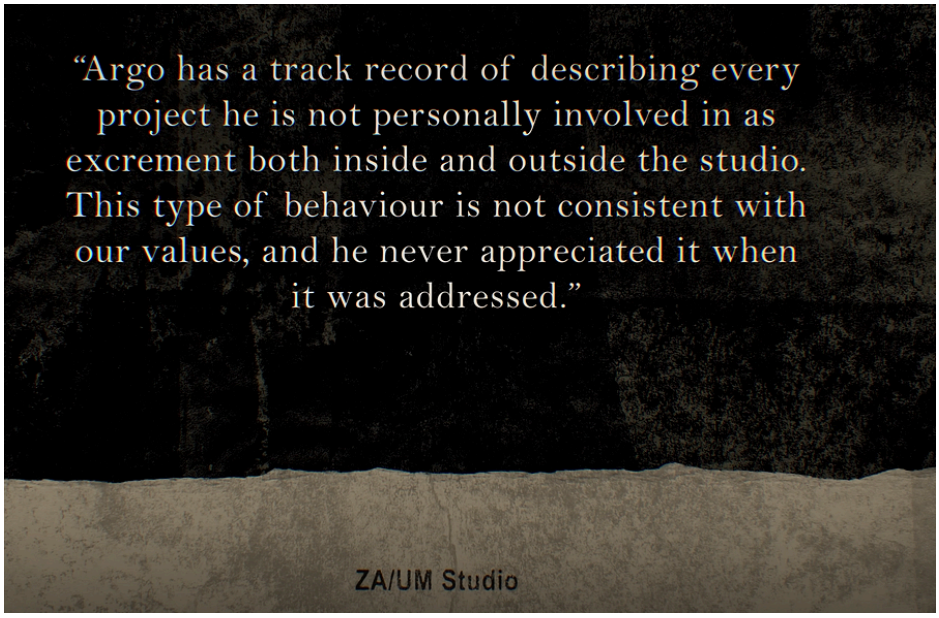
In conclusion, you would think that a majority-remote working studio would have mountains of evidence of two rogue writers publicly calling its flagship project shit, right? Or if not mountains then *some* at least? In the era following ousting two *allegedly* toxic leads one would assume precautions are taken to prevent things like that from happening, right?

WRONG. There's nothing cause it didn't happen. We parted ways quietly and only voiced our concern to the in-house communist-placeholder, **HR lead Patrick Norberg**—trust him guys, he reads Marx before bed—and the leadership, CCO Kaur Kender and in February 2023 to Executive Producer Tõnis Haavel.



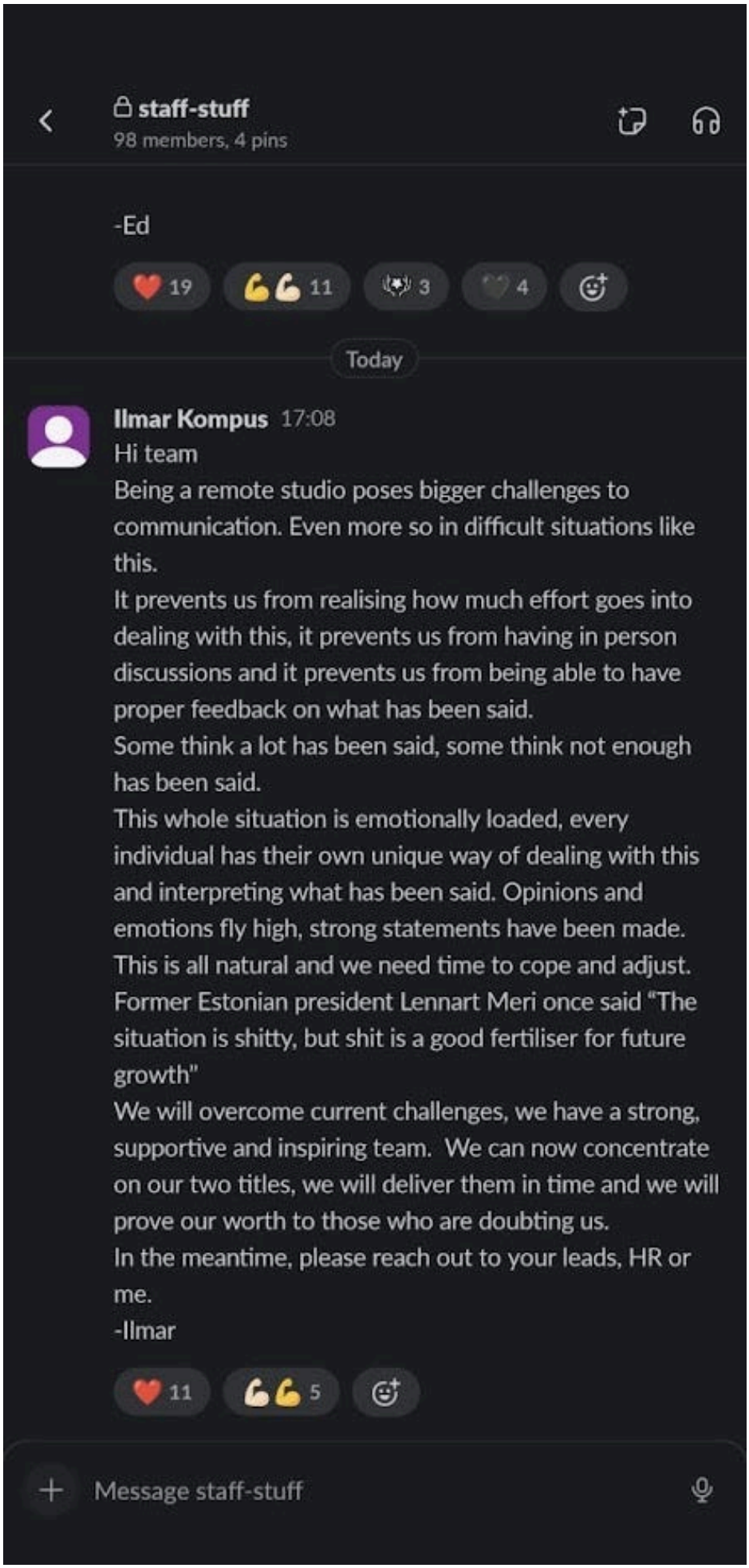
'Insubordination'? Are we in Wagner Grupp? I thought this was an indie-studio if not an art collective.

Moving on…


"Argo has a track record of describing every project he is not personally involved in as excrement both inside and outside the studio. This type of behaviour is not consistent with our values, and he never appreciated it when it was addressed."
ZA/UM Studio

First, one would again think that the studio using words like 'track record' would also be able to showcase some of them 'records', right?

I worked in various legal entities making up Zaum studio for seven years. More than half of it fully remote with all communication taking place on-line. That seems like a sufficient amount of time to not only gather evidence of such disturbing behavior but to also do something about it, no? **Why would you fire Rostov and Robert on incredibly dubious charges of toxicity and Helen on literally nothing and let a man with a track record of "describing every project he is not personally involved with as excrement" stick around?** Sounds like a huge libel risk, no? Definitely not someone you should send to talk to reporters when the studio's reputation is already—here it comes, excremental language—in the shitter, right?


staff-stuff
98 members, 4 pins
-Ed
19
11
3
4
Today
Ilmar Kompus 17:08
Hi team
Being a remote studio poses bigger challenges to communication. Even more so in difficult situations like this.
It prevents us from realising how much effort goes into dealing with this, it prevents us from having in person discussions and it prevents us from being able to have proper feedback on what has been said.
Some think a lot has been said, some think not enough has been said.
This whole situation is emotionally loaded, every individual has their own unique way of dealing with this and interpreting what has been said. Opinions and emotions fly high, strong statements have been made.
This is all natural and we need time to cope and adjust.
Former Estonian president Lennart Meri once said "The situation is shitty, but shit is a good fertiliser for future growth"
We will overcome current challenges, we have a strong, supportive and inspiring team. We can now concentrate on our two titles, we will deliver them in time and we will prove our worth to those who are doubting us.
In the meantime, please reach out to your leads, HR or me.
-Ilmar
11
5
Message staff-stuff

Meanwhile, in the Consistent Values Department:

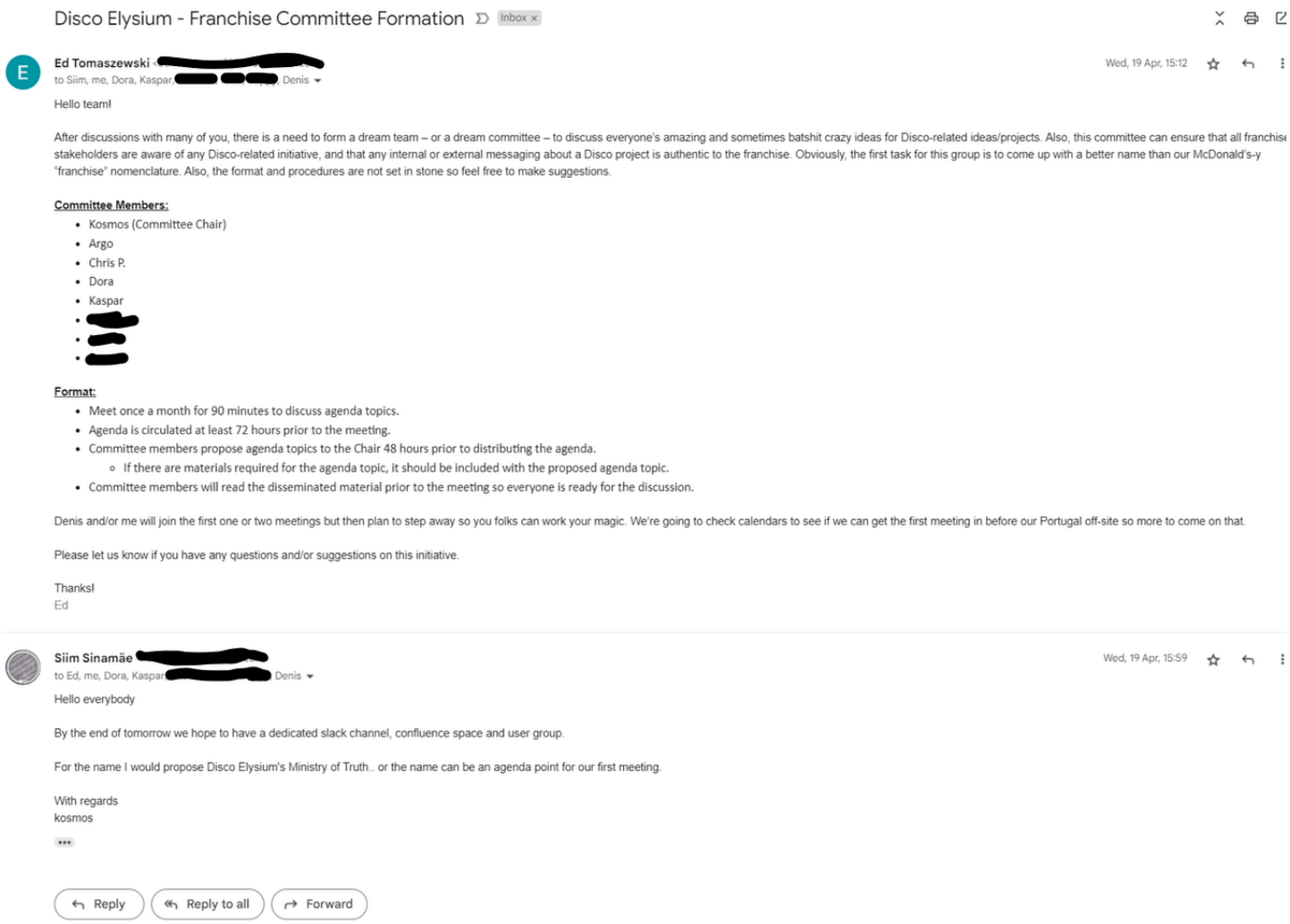
The truth is there is no such records. I *have* been critical of projects/ideas/initiatives in the studio that in my opinion do not live up to the standards of creative quality set by Disco Elysium. And having been an essential part of building up the studio I feel I have earned that right.

I don't think C4 came near those standards. Pioneer One was internally called Potjomkin One cause people including myself, Justin Keenan and many others believed Kaur and Tõnis are prepping to sell the studio and P1 is meant to fool a naive buyer into thinking we are a multi-project studio. I also severely disliked Zaum abolishing the 'no alcohol' policy after Kaur was fired.

Still, in all of the above cases and beyond I retained awareness of people's feelings and never publicly critiqued the projects I wasn't part of. If you, Zaum, claim otherwise then back it up with evidence. Until then your statement is text-book defamation.

"But Argo, you called "**Collage Mode**" an 'absolute garbage' in the **first PMG documentary**!"—I did indeed. Although I had very little insight into Collage Mode in general, I wrote couple of internal area-briefs for it. Still, I was *shocked* to see my name in the credits, mortified that Disco fans would think that Collage Mode is representative of the quality they can expect from the upcoming X7. Me saying that was a deliberate attempt to draw attention both inside and outside the studio to the fact that things are far from alright. I did afterwards apologize to the three people management pointed me to —didn't know yet how big of a role Tõnis himself had played—and for better or worse the outcry pushed the studio to form a 'Quality committee' to prevent further fiascos akin to Collage Mode.

Perhaps publicly calling Collage Mode absolute garbage did earn me a 'track record'. I guess I could've just said "the emperor is naked" instead of "the emperors veiny cock and hairy balls are right in my face". Don't know if it would have led to a Franchise Committee formation though.



Disco Elysium - Franchise Committee Formation Inbox ×

Ed Tomaszewski <[redacted]>
to Siim, me, Dora, Kaspar[redacted], Denis
Wed, 19 Apr, 15:12

Hello team!

After discussions with many of you, there is a need to form a dream team – or a dream committee – to discuss everyone's amazing and sometimes batshit crazy ideas for Disco-related ideas/projects. Also, this committee can ensure that all franchise stakeholders are aware of any Disco-related initiative, and that any internal or external messaging about a Disco project is authentic to the franchise. Obviously, the first task for this group is to come up with a better name than our McDonald's-y "franchise" nomenclature. Also, the format and procedures are not set in stone so feel free to make suggestions.

Committee Members:

- Kosmos (Committee Chair)
- Argo
- Chris P.
- Dora
- Kaspar
- [redacted]
- [redacted]
- [redacted]

Format:

- Meet once a month for 90 minutes to discuss agenda topics.
- Agenda is circulated at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.
- Committee members propose agenda topics to the Chair 48 hours prior to distributing the agenda.
  - If there are materials required for the agenda topic, it should be included with the proposed agenda topic.
- Committee members will read the disseminated material prior to the meeting so everyone is ready for the discussion.

Denis and/or me will join the first one or two meetings but then plan to step away so you folks can work your magic. We're going to check calendars to see if we can get the first meeting in before our Portugal off-site so more to come on that.

Please let us know if you have any questions and/or suggestions on this initiative.

Thanks!
Ed

Siim Sinamäe [redacted]
to Ed, me, Dora, Kaspar[redacted], Denis
Wed, 19 Apr, 15:59

Hello everybody

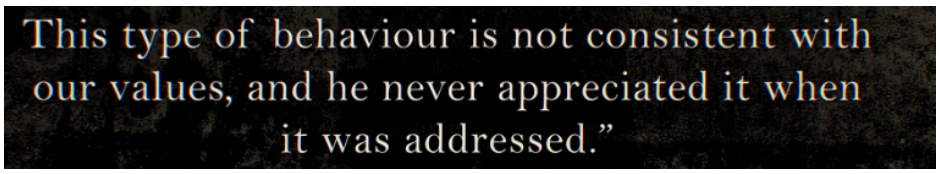
By the end of tomorrow we hope to have a dedicated slack channel, confluence space and user group.

For the name I would propose Disco Elysium's Ministry of Truth.. or the name can be an agenda point for our first meeting.

With regards
kosmos

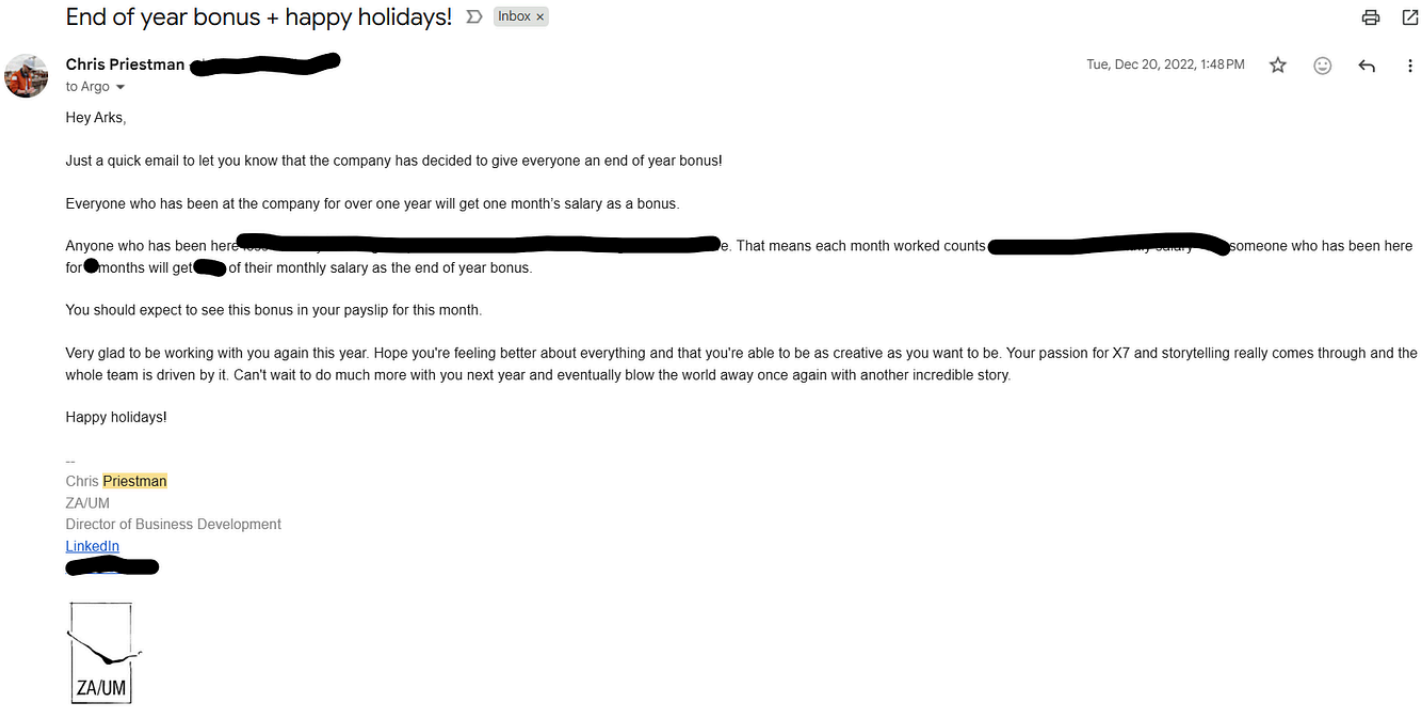
Reply Reply to all Forward

Furthermore…



As this statement reads like Argo's behavior was something that needed to be addressed frequently one would once again assume that since Argo was working fully remotely there would be tons of evidence to support that. Chatlogs from Slack or external messengers? Email chains? Offensive comments on Miro boards? Snarky back-talk in Jira? HR meetings in calendar? **With a repeat-offender— recidivist if you will— like that Argo-guy there's probably records somewhere of some disciplinary action, no? Suspension? Pay decrease? Demotion?** I mean you can't tell me you

let this madman just terrorize a studio of more than hundred people over seven years and didn't do anything about it?



End of year bonus + happy holidays! Inbox ×

Chris Priestman [redacted]
to Argo

Tue, Dec 20, 2022, 1:48 PM

Hey Arks,

Just a quick email to let you know that the company has decided to give everyone an end of year bonus!

Everyone who has been at the company for over one year will get one month's salary as a bonus.

Anyone who has been here [redacted]e. That means each month worked counts [redacted] someone who has been here for [redacted] months will get [redacted] of their monthly salary as the end of year bonus.

You should expect to see this bonus in your payslip for this month.

Very glad to be working with you again this year. Hope you're feeling better about everything and that you're able to be as creative as you want to be. Your passion for X7 and storytelling really comes through and the whole team is driven by it. Can't wait to do much more with you next year and eventually blow the world away once again with another incredible story.

Happy holidays!

--
Chris Priestman
ZA/UM
Director of Business Development
LinkedIn
[redacted]

ZA/UM

Argo Tuulik 11:31 AM
Morning Gabby!

Argo Tuulik 11:39 AM
I saw you sent me the new contract, but like I said Chris yesterday I appreciate the bump up to 75k, but it's still less than I made as a rank-and-file writer on Disco and the Final Cut.
For context I bring home about 4300 a month with this current pump. [redacted] as lead writer brought home [redacted] monthly before and [redacted] after the release.
And with all the new responsibilities, and the stress of both the recent scandals and delivering x7 within a year I don't think my request of 80 000 is unreasonable. Especially given that lead writer salaries in UK start from 75 k and go well above 100k.

Thoughts? :) (edited)

Gabriella Mattina 11:44 AM
Hey Argo! Hope you've had a lovely week. ☀️

Can I please ask that you direct this to Patrick? As he's the one who will have a say in this sort of thing. Apologies I'm not able to assist. (edited)

Argo Tuulik 11:48 AM
Would it be possible that'd you'd convey or simply copy this message to him?
I'm so swamped with x7 stuff I just don't have time for it right now and I'm scared that if not acted on now, it goes the same way of all my NY expense reports - forever waiting for a moment I'm not buried under more important work?

But also feel free to refuse me, I realize it's not your job :)

Gabriella Mattina 11:49 AM
Hey Argo, yeah I have done that so all good. No worries.

Argo Tuulik 11:50 AM
Thank you so much Gabby!!!! ❤️

Gabriella Mattina 11:51 AM
You're very welcome Argo. No prob! 💓

Argo Tuulik 11:50 AM
Thank you so much Gabby!!!! ❤️

Gabriella Mattina 11:51 AM
You're very welcome Argo. No prob! 💓

Gabriella Mattina 11:56 AM
Hey Argo, quick one — is it ok if I approach Chris with this as well to discuss? I know he's already aware anyway but just want your permission as well to see if we can get you at a higher salary. 🙂

Argo Tuulik 12:45 PM
Yes, of course! 🙂

New

Gabriella Mattina 12:45 PM
Thanks Argo! 🙏

Argo Tuulik 12:45 PM
no, thank you! 🙂
💓 1

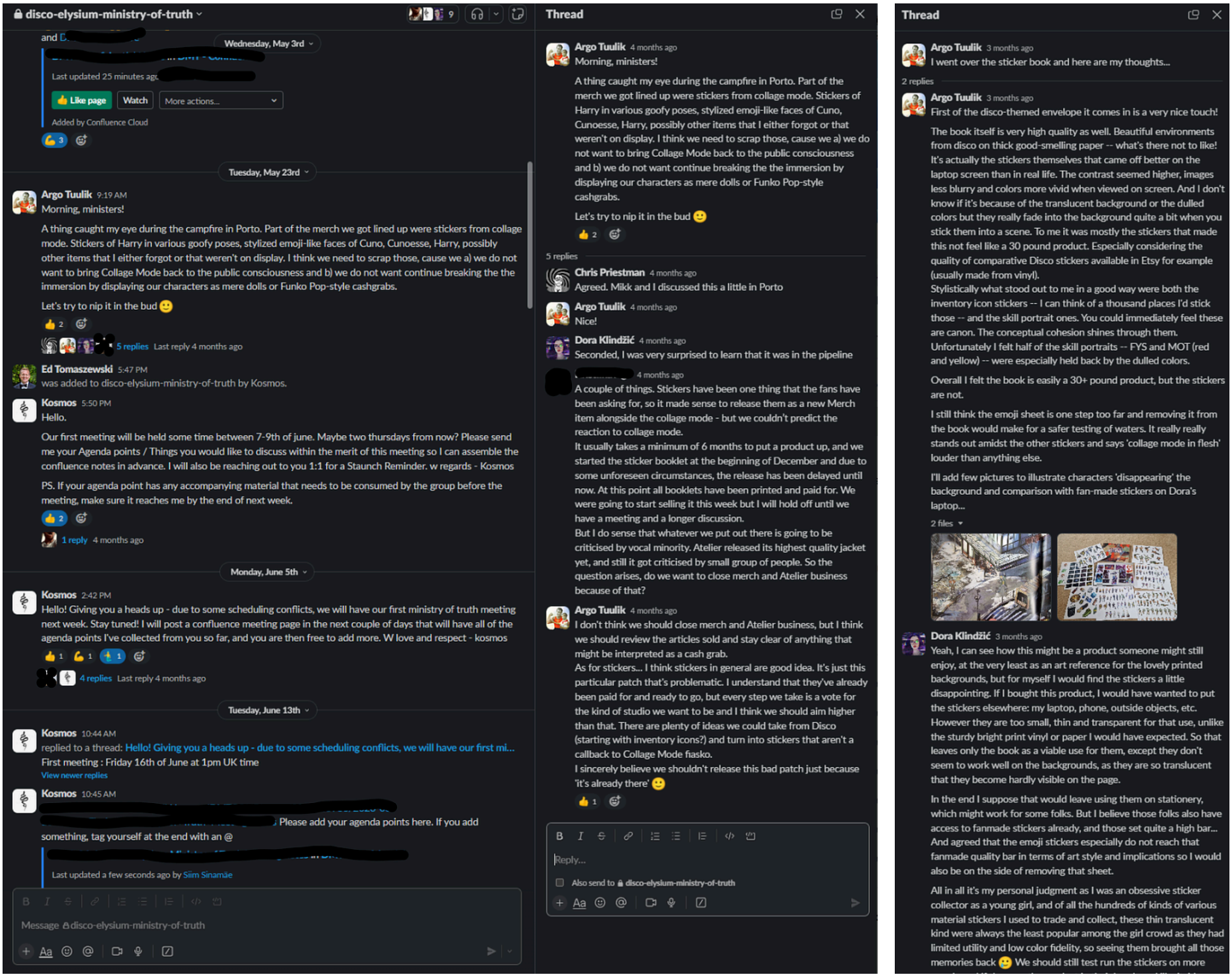
Gabriella Mattina 2:48 PM
Hey Argo, so we're all good to offer £80k now. I will void the current amendment and send a new one out soon-ish. I'm just working on something else at the moment so please do bear with me. 🙂

Argo Tuulik 2:56 PM
You're an angel, Gabby! Thank you much for helping me out with this!!!!!! 🙂

Gabriella Mattina 2:56 PM
You're very welcome, Argo! Very happy to help! 🤍
❤️ 1

Moving on…

The ironically named Ministry of Truth started out promising. Unfortunately something Dora and I quickly learned was that our fellow-ministers were annoyed more than anything else with suggestions aligning with the original intent of the group's formation, that being the integrity of the Disco Elysium IP.


disco-elysium-ministry-of-truth
Wednesday, May 3rd
Like page
Watch
More actions...
Added by Confluence Cloud
Tuesday, May 23rd
Argo Tuulik 9:19 AM
Morning, ministers!
A thing caught my eye during the campfire in Porto. Part of the merch we got lined up were stickers from collage mode. Stickers of Harry in various goofy poses, stylized emoji-like faces of Cuno, Cunoesse, Harry, possibly other items that I either forgot or that weren't on display. I think we need to scrap those, cause we a) we do not want to bring Collage Mode back to the public consciousness and b) we do not want continue breaking the the immersion by displaying our characters as mere dolls or Funko Pop-style cashgrabs.
Let's try to nip it in the bud
5 replies Last reply 4 months ago
Ed Tomaszewski 5:47 PM
was added to disco-elysium-ministry-of-truth by Kosmos.
Kosmos 5:50 PM
Hello.
Our first meeting will be held some time between 7-9th of june. Maybe two thursdays from now? Please send me your Agenda points / Things you would like to discuss within the merit of this meeting so I can assemble the confluence notes in advance. I will also be reaching out to you 1:1 for a Staunch Reminder. w regards - Kosmos
PS. If your agenda point has any accompanying material that needs to be consumed by the group before the meeting, make sure it reaches me by the end of next week.
1 reply 4 months ago
Monday, June 5th
Kosmos 2:42 PM
Hello! Giving you a heads up - due to some scheduling conflicts, we will have our first ministry of truth meeting next week. Stay tuned! I will post a confluence meeting page in the next couple of days that will have all of the agenda points I've collected from you so far, and you are then free to add more. W love and respect - kosmos
4 replies Last reply 4 months ago
Tuesday, June 13th
Kosmos 10:44 AM
replied to a thread: Hello! Giving you a heads up - due to some scheduling conflicts, we will have our first mi...
First meeting : Friday 16th of June at 1pm UK time
View newer replies
Kosmos 10:45 AM
[redacted] Please add your agenda points here. If you add something, tag yourself at the end with an @
Last updated a few seconds ago by Siim Sinamäe
Message disco-elysium-ministry-of-truth
Thread
Argo Tuulik 4 months ago
Morning, ministers!
A thing caught my eye during the campfire in Porto. Part of the merch we got lined up were stickers from collage mode. Stickers of Harry in various goofy poses, stylized emoji-like faces of Cuno, Cunoesse, Harry, possibly other items that I either forgot or that weren't on display. I think we need to scrap those, cause we a) we do not want to bring Collage Mode back to the public consciousness and b) we do not want continue breaking the the immersion by displaying our characters as mere dolls or Funko Pop-style cashgrabs.
Let's try to nip it in the bud
5 replies
Chris Priestman 4 months ago
Agreed. Mikk and I discussed this a little in Porto
Argo Tuulik 4 months ago
Nice!
Dora Klindžić 4 months ago
Seconded, I was very surprised to learn that it was in the pipeline
[redacted] 4 months ago
A couple of things. Stickers have been one thing that the fans have been asking for, so it made sense to release them as a new Merch item alongside the collage mode - but we couldn't predict the reaction to collage mode.
It usually takes a minimum of 6 months to put a product up, and we started the sticker booklet at the beginning of December and due to some unforeseen circumstances, the release has been delayed until now. At this point all booklets have been printed and paid for. We were going to start selling it this week but I will hold off until we have a meeting and a longer discussion.
But I do sense that whatever we put out there is going to be criticised by vocal minority. Atelier released its highest quality jacket yet, and still it got criticised by small group of people. So the question arises, do we want to close merch and Atelier business because of that?
Argo Tuulik 4 months ago
I don't think we should close merch and Atelier business, but I think we should review the articles sold and stay clear of anything that might be interpreted as a cash grab.
As for stickers... I think stickers in general are good idea. It's just this particular patch that's problematic. I understand that they've already been paid for and ready to go, but every step we take is a vote for the kind of studio we want to be and I think we should aim higher than that. There are plenty of ideas we could take from Disco (starting with inventory icons?) and turn into stickers that aren't a callback to Collage Mode fiasko.
I sincerely believe we shouldn't release this bad patch just because 'it's already there'
Reply...
Also send to disco-elysium-ministry-of-truth
Thread
Argo Tuulik 3 months ago
I went over the sticker book and here are my thoughts...
2 replies
Argo Tuulik 3 months ago
First of the disco-themed envelope it comes in is a very nice touch!
The book itself is very high quality as well. Beautiful environments from disco on thick good-smelling paper -- what's there not to like! It's actually the stickers themselves that came off better on the laptop screen than in real life. The contrast seemed higher, images less blurry and colors more vivid when viewed on screen. And I don't know if it's because of the translucent background or the dulled colors but they really fade into the background quite a bit when you stick them into a scene. To me it was mostly the stickers that made this not feel like a 30 pound product. Especially considering the quality of comparative Disco stickers available in Etsy for example (usually made from vinyl).
Stylistically what stood out to me in a good way were both the inventory icon stickers -- I can think of a thousand places I'd stick those -- and the skill portrait ones. You could immediately feel these are canon. The conceptual cohesion shines through them.
Unfortunately I felt half of the skill portraits -- FYS and MOT (red and yellow) -- were especially held back by the dulled colors.
Overall I felt the book is easily a 30+ pound product, but the stickers are not.
I still think the emoji sheet is one step too far and removing it from the book would make for a safer testing of waters. It really really stands out amidst the other stickers and says 'collage mode in flesh' louder than anything else.
I'll add few pictures to illustrate characters 'disappearing' the background and comparison with fan-made stickers on Dora's laptop...
2 files
Dora Klindžić 3 months ago
Yeah, I can see how this might be a product someone might still enjoy, at the very least as an art reference for the lovely printed backgrounds, but for myself I would find the stickers a little disappointing. If I bought this product, I would have wanted to put the stickers elsewhere: my laptop, phone, outside objects, etc. However they are too small, thin and transparent for that use, unlike the sturdy bright print vinyl or paper I would have expected. So that leaves only the book as a viable use for them, except they don't seem to work well on the backgrounds, as they are so translucent that they become hardly visible on the page.
In the end I suppose that would leave using them on stationery, which might work for some folks. But I believe those folks also have access to fanmade stickers already, and those set quite a high bar... And agreed that the emoji stickers especially do not reach that fanmade quality bar in terms of art style and implications so I would also be on the side of removing that sheet.
All in all it's my personal judgment as I was an obsessive sticker collector as a young girl, and of all the hundreds of kinds of various material stickers I used to trade and collect, these thin translucent kind were always the least popular among the girl crowd as they had limited utility and low color fidelity, so seeing them brought all those memories back We should still test run the stickers on more

Some things—you *don't* want to know—we were able to indeed 'nip in the bud'. Others not. Listening to the audio from these meetings I see how president Tomaszewski grows increasingly more frustrated with myself and Dora. Right before Christmas we have a discussion over Disco's PS store 'Christmas card'. My heart freezes when I hear something already exists. Head of Publishing shows it off.

@awesomonster
Follow
you know what, sure, peggle make phone calls who gives a shit anymore
Allow Peggle Blast to make and manage phone calls?
3 of 3
DENY
ALLOW

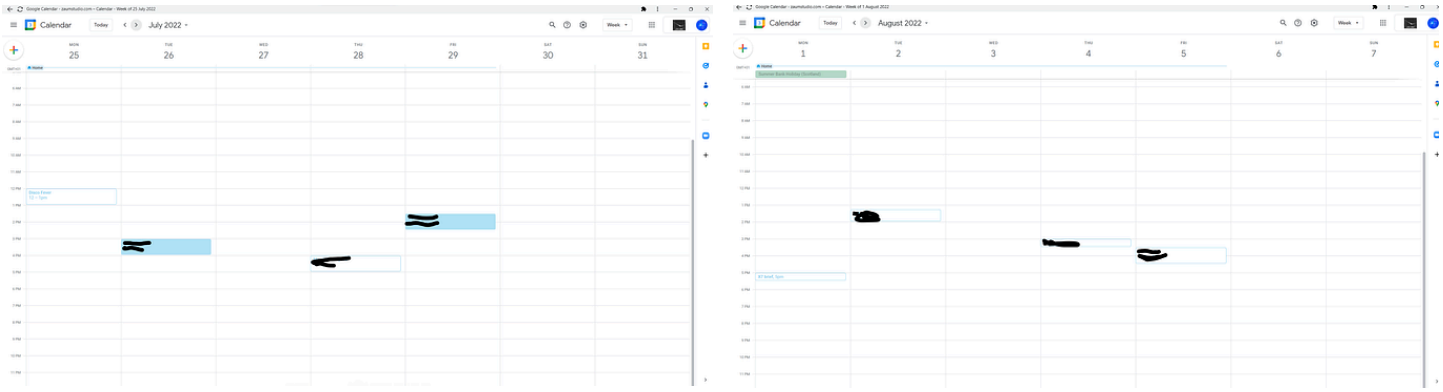
Take it away, Peggle, take everything away.

I don't want to say anything. I don't want to point to the obvious: Christmas doesn't exist in Elysium. But it's just the tip of the iceberg. Representation of Cuno and Cunoesse is the bottom. That's kinda serious considering X7's (admittedly unrealistic) launch date is in less than 12 months. I ask if we can have one day with the artist, or even couple of hours. I swear we can make something that communicates the same holiday vibe but is holistic with Disco and the world of Elysium. They all look at me like I'm the most difficult person in the world. Maybe I am but I thought this was exactly what this committee was for. "Everybody does it. It's not a big deal. Yeah, but this already exists. Look, it's just a game." is the resounding consensus as the committee decides to go with the non-canon Christmas card. Dora and I don't get invited to further Ministry of Truth meetings.

But I digress and you probably want to hear about **Locust City**.

After being removed from C4 in July we wait for about a month for **CCO Kaur Kender** to return from sickleave. Once back he expresses joy over 'having us all to himself' and gives us a task to come up with a concept for a stand-alone expansion to Disco Elysium. Dora and I are against making an Elysium-game. We argue that it will make the studio come off as creatively bankrupt. We want a new start and we want to challenge ourselves. Management disagrees and insists: it has to be a disco-expansion.

We were not really in a position to argue and after thinking a bit on how to innovate on existing formula—in all fairness the innovations came mostly from Dora—and who the right POV character(s) would be for the job we presented the management with X7.



X7 was conceptualized between 25th of June and 1 of August 2022.

This post has already becoming cyclopean in size so I'm not gonna go into details about the early development of X7. It took off way better than we had anticipated. Better than anyone had anticipated I dare to say. On Zaum's 2022 Christmas party in the BAFTA-house in London, Dora and I first present the project to the rest of the studio. It is met with overwhelming excitement by our colleagues. I think everyone felt afterwards that perhaps there's hope still for the studio.

At this point it's worth mentioning that Zaum has a conflicted relationship with the concept of pre-production. Disco didn't really have one, neither did C4. P1 was basically 5 years of pre-preproduction and X7 didn't get one either. Very early in the project Dora and I found ourselves in a situation where the other teams were asking for briefs for sections or characters of the game that didn't yet exist or systems no one had thought about yet. When the X7 team was still around 10 people it was somehow manageable. Difficult but manageable. But as more people joined we knew we needed writing assistance, since at the end of the day we were making a narrative-driven RPG.

We first asked for writing help before 2022 Christmas, even had candidates in mind. Management shot it down. We kept asking over the the spring of 2023. I proposed that perhaps a couple of writers

from C4 could lend us a hand since they had all joined to (and been hired for) work on an Elysium-project. Management refused.

Things came to a halt in May 2023 when news of P1's pending cancellation started spreading and in a meeting with Dora and Chris Priestman, **Lead-Producer Phil Davidson** and I were arguing over the future of the writing team.

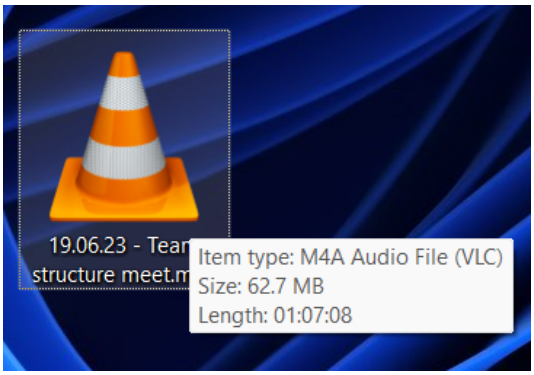
I once again proposed getting help from the writers on C4, which was at the time going through a second great reset. I argued that since we're making an Elysium-game then it makes much more sense to enlist the help of people we already hired for Elysium projects. Furthermore, because P1 was forever stuck in pre-production limbo, then contrary to C4 the writers working on the project had not yet learned how to use Articy, the primary dialogue writing tool for all projects. So essentially we would have to start from scratch with them. And because Dora and I were already struggling splitting our time between keeping other X7 teams supplied with work and feedback and getting our own writing done, it seemed like having to start tutoring an inexperienced writing team from the ground up with the release date less than a year away is sheer madness. I felt more than anything that the management's decision to not allow C4 writers to help out on X7 was emotional more than anything else because multiple writers had expressed the desire to help with X7.

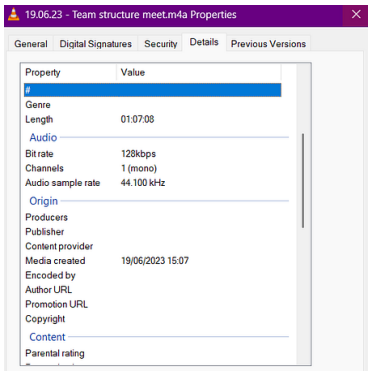
You can probably see **Turdgate** approaching a mile away. Phil is getting more and more frustrated with me and I with him. About 45 minutes into an hour long meeting he finally slams it on the table. Ultima Ratio. **"Either the P1 writing team joins X7 or the project will be cancelled."** Have you ever seen a grown man fail an Authority check right in front of you? I have. **"I'd rather have it cancelled than make a turd,"** I retort. Those exact words.

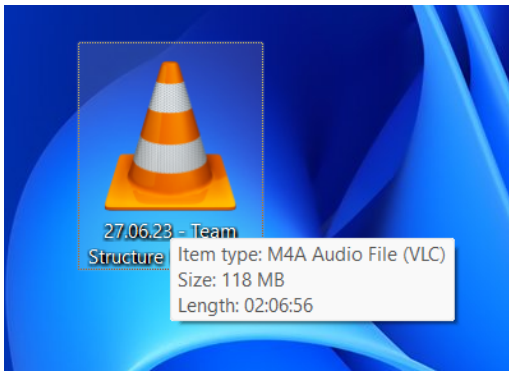
Dora jumps in to diffuse the situation. Priestman hasn't said a word in 15 minutes. Clearly emotions have boiled over. We part ways and Phil goes to Tõnis. I go to X7 team retro. In the "what went wrong this sprint" section of the retro I state **'project cancellation should not be used as a bargaining chip'** and share with the team what happened. I assure them Phil has no authority to make such claims —something both Tõnis and president Tomaszewski later confirm.

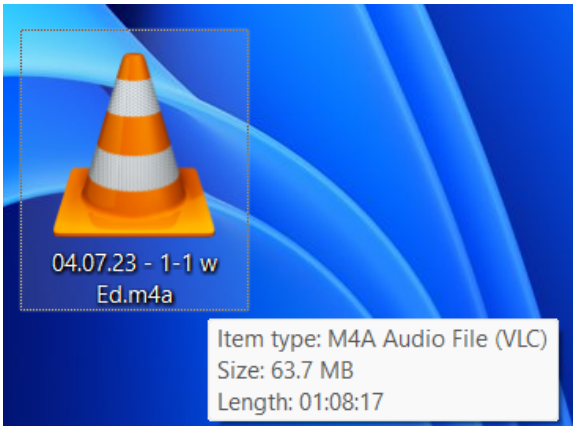
I expected more to come out of this. Either Phil being reprimanded or myself having a discussion with HR but nothing happens. Not until 19th of June 2023, weeks after X7 had absorbed P1 writing team, when during a writing team structure discussion **Executive Producer Tõnis Haavel** orders **Lead Producer Phil Davidson** to repeat my words from "Turdgate" in front of **former P1 Lead Writer Jim Ashilevi**, Chris Priestman, Dora, and myself. The purpose of this, he later explains, is educational. If *I* felt comfortable sharing Phil's project cancellation ultimatum with the X7 team then why wouldn't he repeat *my* words back to Jim?

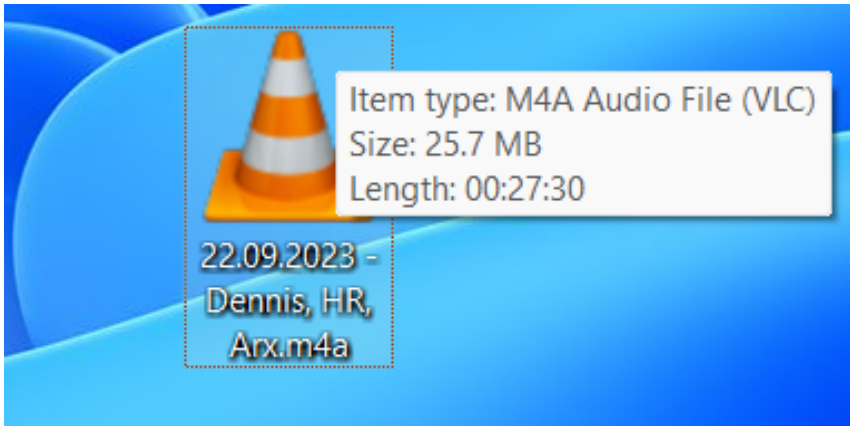
The meeting was an absolute disaster and derailed the writing team structure talks for many weeks, spawning multiple unavoidable meetings to address what had happened that day.



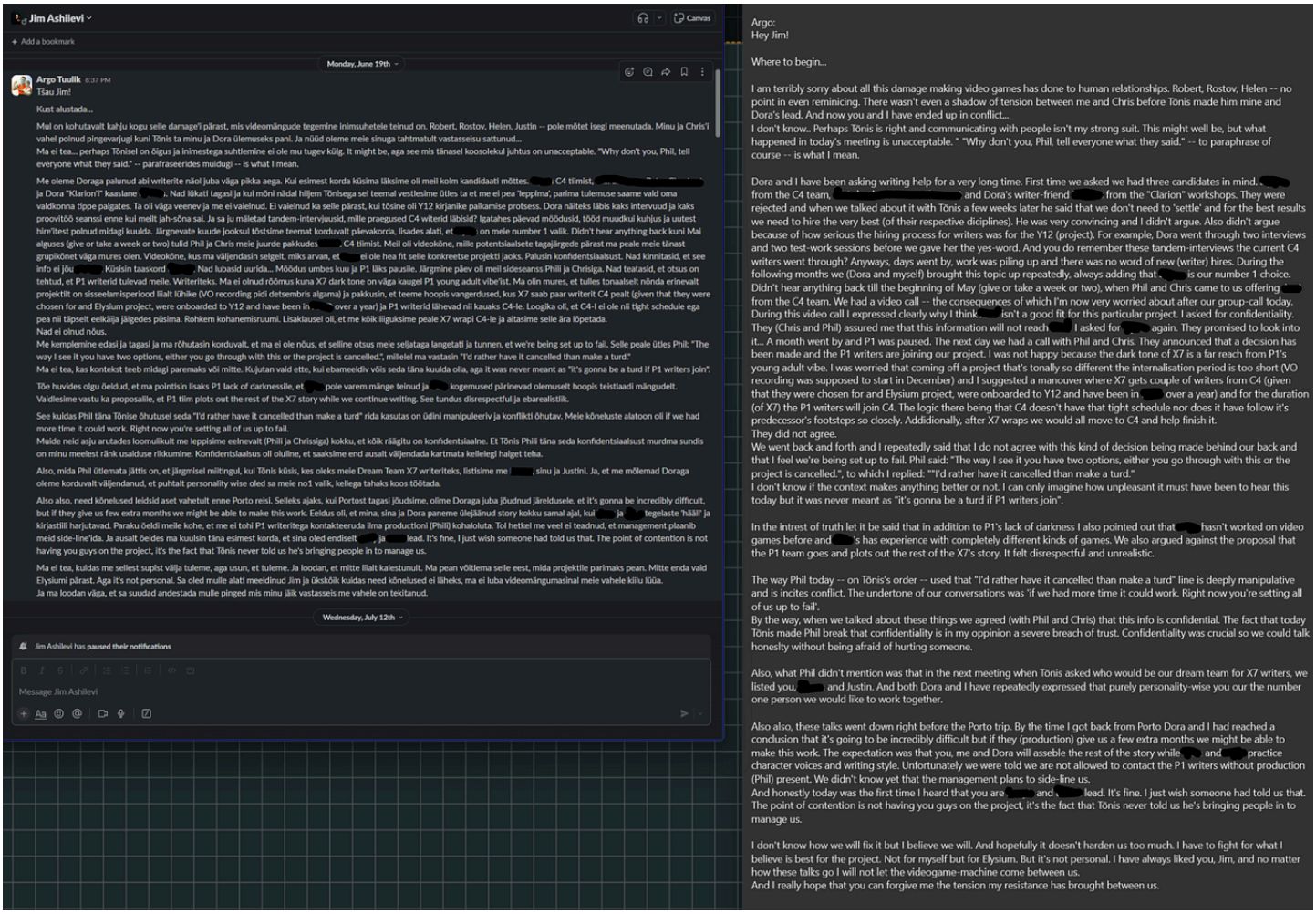




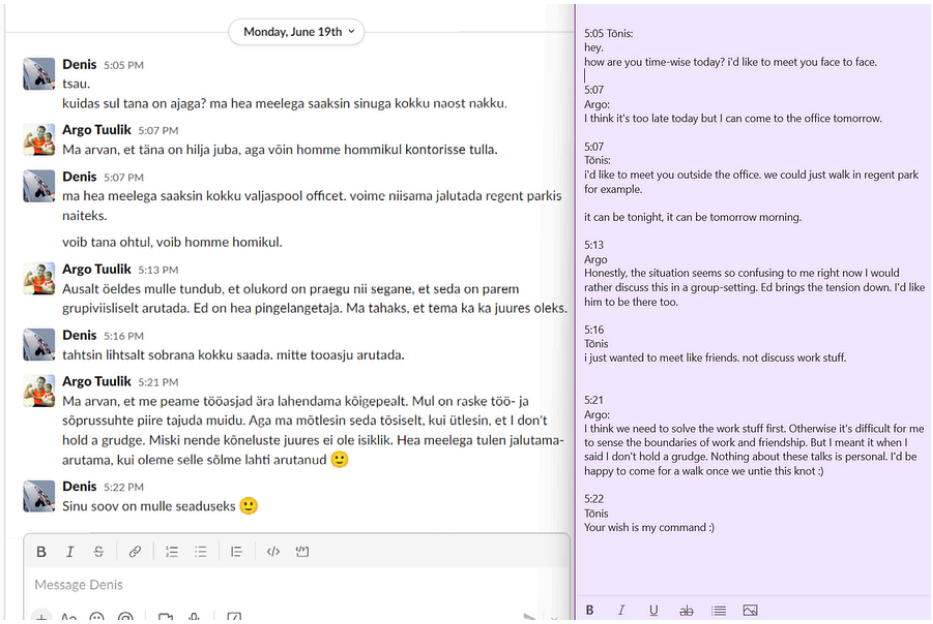




When the "Turdgate" call ends, the first thing I do is write Jim…

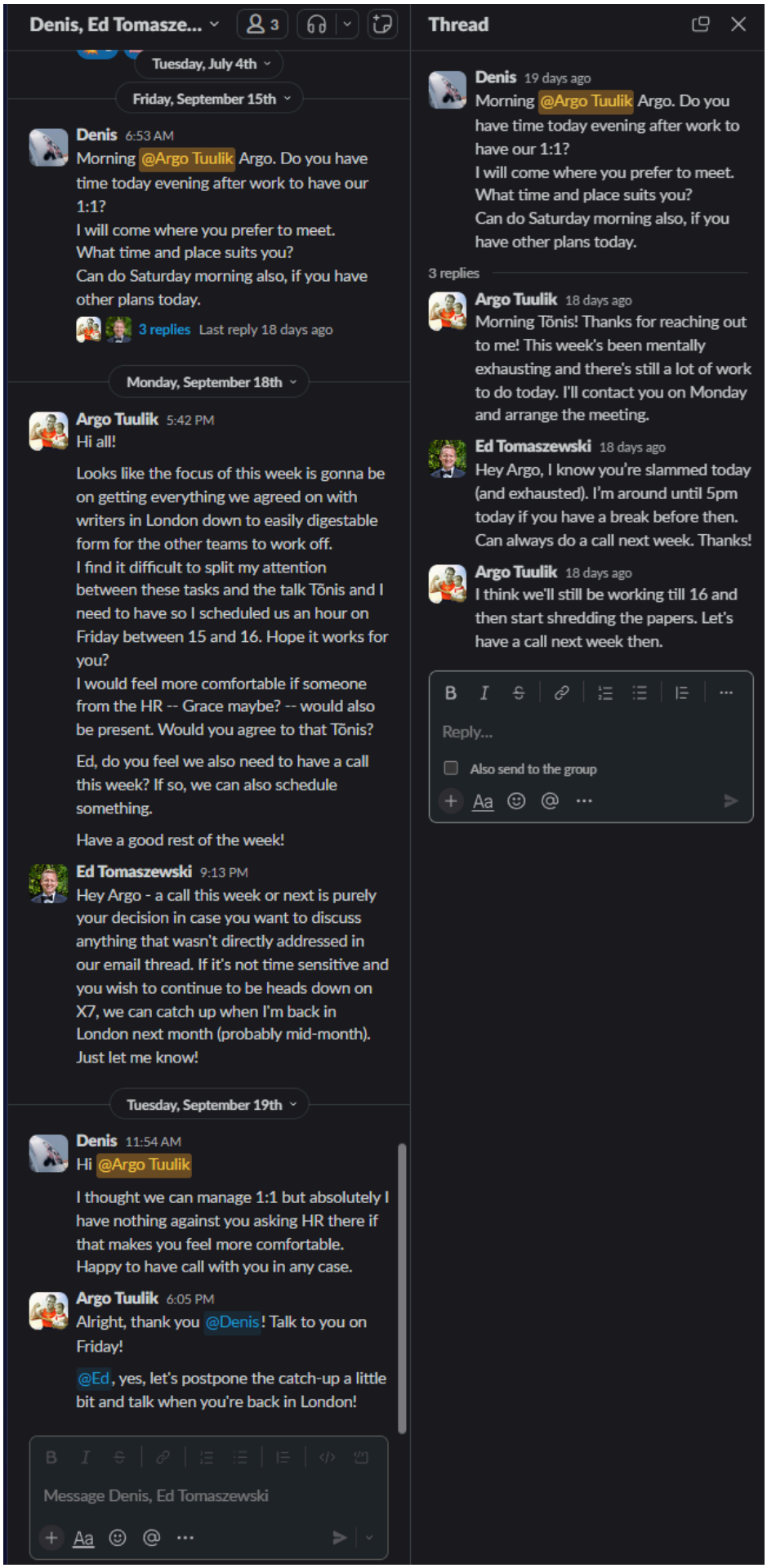

Jim Ashilevi
Canvas
Add a bookmark
Monday, June 19th
Argo Tuulik 8:37 PM
Tšau Jim!
Kust alustada...
Mul on kohutavalt kahju kogu selle damage'i pärast, mis videomängude tegemine inimsuhetele teinud on. Robert, Rostov, Helen, Justin -- pole mõtet isegi meenutada. Minu ja Chris'i vahel polnud pingevarjugi kuni Tõnis ta minu ja Dora ülemuseks pani. Ja nüüd oleme meie sinuga tahtmatult vastasseisu sattunud...
Ma ei tea... perhaps Tõnisel on õigus ja inimestega suhtlemine ei ole mu tugev külg. It might be, aga see mis tänasel koosolekul juhtus on unacceptable. "Why don't you, Phil, tell everyone what they said." -- parafraseerides muidugi -- is what I mean.
Me oleme Doraga palunud abi writerite näol juba väga pikka aega. Kui esimest korda küsima läksime oli meil kolm kandidaati mõttes, C4 tiimist, ja Dora "Klarion'i" kaaslane, . Nad lükati tagasi ja kui mõni nädal hiljem Tõnisega sel teemal vestlesime ütles ta et me ei pea 'leppima', parima tulemuse saame vaid oma valdkonna tippe palgates. Ta oli väga veenev ja me ei vaielnud. Ei vaielnud ka selle pärast, kui tõsine oli Y12 kirjanike palkamise protsess. Dora näiteks läbis kaks intervuud ja kaks proovitöö seanssi enne kui meilt jah-sõna sai. Ja sa ju mäletad tandem-intervjuusid, mille praegused C4 writerid läbisid? Igatahes päevad möödusid, tööd muudkui kuhjus ja uutest hire'itest polnud midagi kuulda. Järgnevate kuude jooksul tõstsime teemat korduvalt päevakorda, lisades alati, et on meie number 1 valik. Didn't hear anything back kuni Mai alguses (give or take a week or two) tulid Phil ja Chris meie juurde pakkudes C4 tiimist. Meil oli videokõne, mille potentsiaalsete tagajärgede pärast ma peale meie tänast grupikõnet väga mures olen. Videokõne, kus ma väljendasin selgelt, miks arvan, et ei ole hea fit selle konkreetse projekti jaoks. Palusin konfidentsiaalsust. Nad kinnitasid, et see info ei jõu . Küsisin taaskord , Nad lubasid uurida... Möödus umbes kuu ja P1 läks pausile. Järgmine päev oli meil sideseanss Phili ja Chrisiga. Nad teatasid, et otsus on tehtud, et P1 writerid tulevad meile. Writeriteks. Ma ei olnud rõõmus kuna X7 dark tone on väga kaugel P1 young adult vibe'ist. Ma olin mures, et tulles tonaalselt nõnda erinevalt projektilt on sisseelamisperiood liialt lühike (VO recording pidi detsembris algama) ja pakkusin, et teeme hoopis vangerdused, kus X7 saab paar writerit C4 pealt (given that they were chosen for and Elysium project, were onboarded to Y12 and have been in over a year) ja P1 writerid lähevad nii kauaks C4-le. Loogika oli, et C4-l ei ole nii tight schedule ega pea nii täpselt eelkäija jälgedes püsima. Rohkem kohanemisruumi. Lisaklausel oli, et me kõik liiguksime peale X7 wrapi C4-le ja aitasime selle ära lõpetada.
Nad ei olnud nõus.
Me kemplemine edasi ja tagasi ja ma rõhutasin korduvalt, et ma ei ole nõus, et selline otsus meie seljataga langetati ja tunnen, et we're being set up to fail. Selle peale ütles Phil: "The way I see it you have two options, either you go through with this or the project is cancelled.", millelel ma vastasin "I'd rather have it cancelled than make a turd."
Ma ei tea, kas kontekst teeb midagi paremaks või mitte. Kujutan vaid ette, kui ebameeldiv võis seda täna kuulda olla, aga it was never meant as "it's gonna be a turd if P1 writers join".
Tõe huvides olgu öeldud, et ma pointisin lisaks P1 lack of darknessile, et pole varem mänge teinud ja kogemused pärinevad olemuselt hoopis teistlaadi mängudelt. Valdiesime vastu ka proposallile, et P1 tiim plots out the rest of the X7 story while we continue writing. See tundus düsrespectful ja ebarealistlik.
See kuidas Phil täna Tõnise õhutusel seda "I'd rather have it cancelled than make a turd" rida kasutas on üdini manipuleeriv ja konflikti õhutav. Meie kõneluste alatoon oli if we had more time it could work. Right now you're setting all of us up to fail.
Muide neid asju arutades loomulikult me leppisime eelnevalt (Phili ja Chrissiga) kokku, et kõik räägitu on konfidentsiaalne. Et Tõnis Phili täna seda konfidentsiaalsust murdma sundis on minu meelest ränk usalduse rikkumine. Konfidentsiaalsus oli oluline, et saaksime end ausalt väljendada kartmata kellelegi haiget teha.
Also, mida Phil ütlemata jättis on, et järgmisel miitingul, kui Tõnis küsis, kes oleks meie Dream Team X7 writeriteks, listisime mei sinu ja Justini. Ja, et me mõlemad Doraga oleme korduvalt väljendanud, et puhtalt personality wise oled sa meie no1 valik, kellega tahaks koos töötada.
Also also, need kõnelused leidsid aset vahetult enne Porto reisi. Selleks ajaks, kui Portost tagasi jõudsime, olime Doraga juba jõudnud järeldusele, et it's gonna be incredibly difficult, but if they give us few extra months we might be able to make this work. Eeldus oli, et mina, sina ja Dora paneme ülejäänud story kokku samal ajal, kui ja tegelaste 'hääl' ja kirjastiili harjutavad. Paraku öeldi meile kohe, et me ei tohi P1 writeritega kontakteeruda ilma productioni (Phili) kohaloluta. Tol hetkel me veel ei teadnud, et management plaanib meid side-line'ida. Ja ausalt öeldes ma kuulsin täna esimest korda, et sina oled endiselt ja lead. It's fine, I just wish someone had told us that. The point of contention is not having you guys on the project, it's the fact that Tõnis never told us he's bringing people in to manage us.
Ma ei tea, kuidas me sellest supist välja tuleme, aga usun, et tuleme. Ja loodan, et mitte liialt kalestunult. Ma pean võitlema selle eest, mida projektile parimaks pean. Mitte enda vaid Elysiumi pärast. Aga it's not personal. Sa oled mulle alati meeldinud Jim ja üksköik kuidas need kõnelused ei läheks, ma ei luba videomängumasinal meie vahele kiilu lüüa.
Ja ma loodan väga, et sa suudad andestada mulle pinged mis minu jäik vastasseis me vahele on tekitanud.
Wednesday, July 12th
Jim Ashilevi has paused their notifications
Message Jim Ashilevi
Argo:
Hey Jim!
Where to begin...
I am terribly sorry about all this damage making video games has done to human relationships. Robert, Rostov, Helen -- no point in even reminicing. There wasn't even a shadow of tension between me and Chris before Tõnis made him mine and Dora's lead. And now you and I have ended up in conflict...
I don't know.. Perhaps Tõnis is right and communicating with people isn't my strong suit. This might well be, but what happened in today's meeting is unacceptable. " "Why don't you, Phil, tell everyone what they said." -- to paraphrase of course -- is what I mean.
Dora and I have been asking writing help for a very long time. First time we asked we had three candidates in mind. from the C4 team, and Dora's writer-friend from the "Clarion" workshops. They were rejected and when we talked about it with Tõnis a few weeks later he said that we don't need to 'settle' and for the best results we need to hire the very best (of their respective diciplines). He was very convincing and I didn't argue. Also didn't argue because of how serious the hiring process for writers was for the Y12 (project). For example, Dora went through two interviews and two test-work sessions before we gave her the yes-word. And you do remember these tandem-interviews the current C4 writers went through? Anyways, days went by, work was piling up and there was no word of new (writer) hires. During the following months we (Dora and myself) brought this topic up repeatedly, always adding that is our number 1 choice. Didn't hear anything back till the beginning of May (give or take a week or two), when Phil and Chris came to us offering from the C4 team. We had a video call -- the consequences of which I'm now very worried about after our group-call today. During this video call I expressed clearly why I think isn't a good fit for this particular project. I asked for confidentiality. They (Chris and Phil) assured me that this information will not reach I asked for again. They promised to look into it... A month went by and P1 was paused. The next day we had a call with Phil and Chris. They announced that a decision has been made and the P1 writers are joining our project. I was not happy because the dark tone of X7 is a far reach from P1's young adult vibe. I was worried that coming off a project that's tonally so different the internalisation period is too short (VO recording was supposed to start in December) and I suggested a manouver where X7 gets couple of writers from C4 (given that they were chosen for and Elysium project, were onboarded to Y12 and have been in over a year) and for the duration (of X7) the P1 writers will join C4. The logic there being that C4 doesn't have that tight schedule nor does it have follow it's predecessor's footsteps so closely. Addidionally, after X7 wraps we would all move to C4 and help finish it.
They did not agree.
We went back and forth and I repeatedly said that I do not agree with this kind of decision being made behind our back and that I feel we're being set up to fail. Phil said: "The way I see it you have two options, either you go through with this or the project is cancelled.", to which I replied: ""I'd rather have it cancelled than make a turd."
I don't know if the context makes anything better or not. I can only imagine how unpleasant it must have been to hear this today but it was never meant as "it's gonna be a turd if P1 writers join".
In the intrest of truth let it be said that in addition to P1's lack of darkness I also pointed out that hasn't worked on video games before and 's has experience with completely different kinds of games. We also argued against the proposal that the P1 team goes and plots out the rest of the X7's story. It felt disrespectful and unrealistic.
The way Phil today -- on Tõnis's order -- used that "I'd rather have it cancelled than make a turd" line is deeply manipulative and is incites conflict. The undertone of our conversations was "if we had more time it could work. Right now you're setting all of us up to fail".
By the way, when we talked about these things we agreed (with Phil and Chris) that this info is confidential. The fact that today Tõnis made Phil break that confidentiality is in my oppinion a severe breach of trust. Confidentiality was crucial so we could talk honesty without being afraid of hurting someone.
Also, what Phil didn't mention was that in the next meeting when Tõnis asked who would be our dream team for X7 writers, we listed you, and Justin. And both Dora and I have repeatedly expressed that purely personality-wise you our the number one person we would like to work together.
Also also, these talks went down right before the Porto trip. By the time I got back from Porto Dora and I had reached a conclusion that it's going to be incredibly difficult but if they (production) give us a few extra months we might be able to make this work. The expectation was that you, me and Dora will asseble the rest of the story while and practice character voices and writing style. Unfortunately we were told we are not allowed to contact the P1 writers without production (Phil) present. We didn't know yet that the management plans to side-line us.
And honestly today was the first time I heard that you are and lead. It's fine. I just wish someone had told us that. The point of contention is not having you guys on the project, it's the fact that Tõnis never told us he's bringing people in to manage us.
I don't know how we will fix it but I believe we will. And hopefully it doesn't harden us too much. I have to fight for what I believe is best for the project. Not for myself but for Elysium. But it's not personal. I have always liked you, Jim, and no matter how these talks go I will not let the videogame-machine come between us.
And I really hope that you can forgive me the tension my resistance has brought between us.

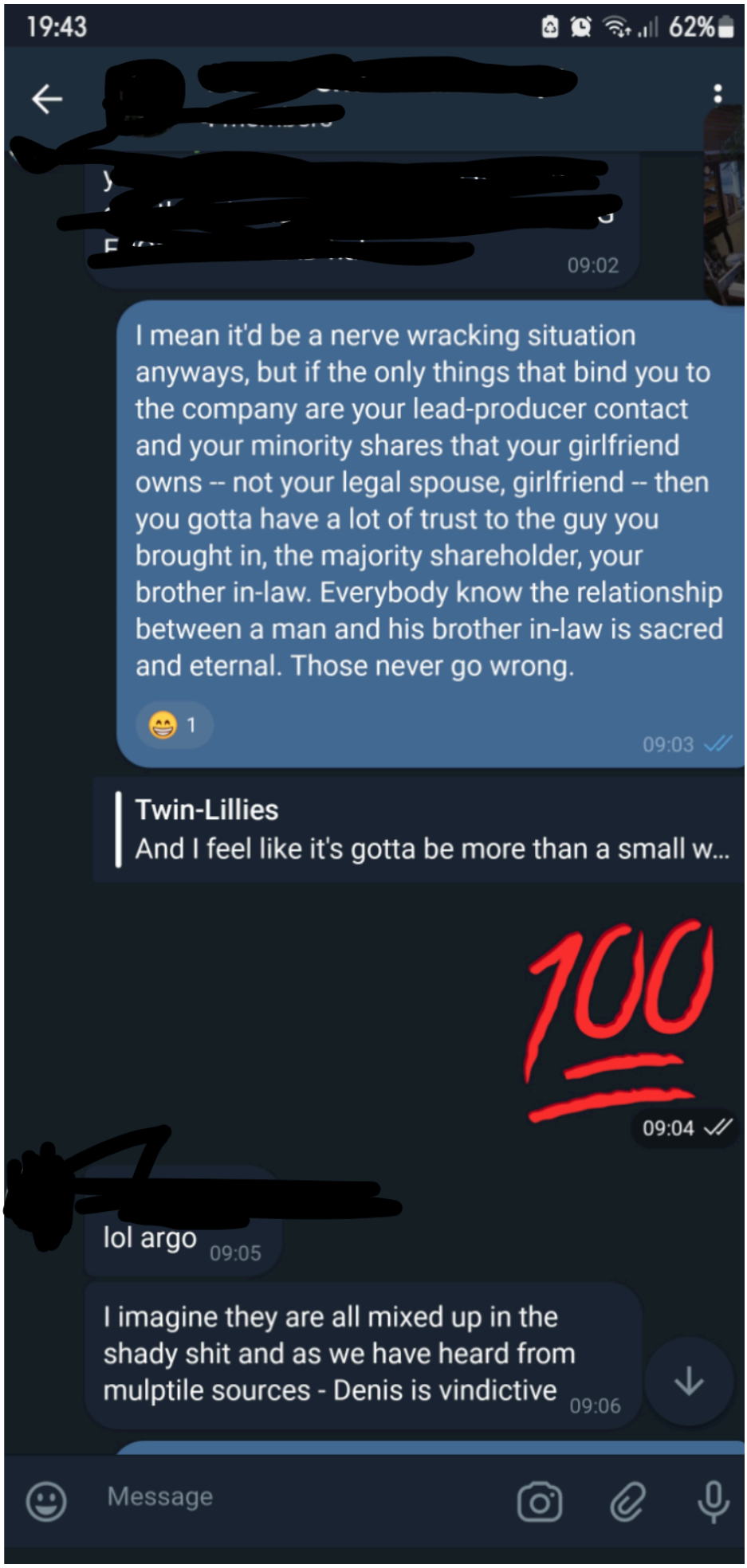
When I finish I see Tõnis has already messaged me in Slack...


Monday, June 19th
Denis 5:05 PM
tsau.
kuidas sul tana on ajaga? ma hea meelega saaksin sinuga kokku naost nakku.
Argo Tuulik 5:07 PM
Ma arvan, et täna on hilja juba, aga võin homme hommikul kontorisse tulla.
Denis 5:07 PM
ma hea meelega saaksin kokku valjaspool officet. voime niisama jalutada regent parkis naiteks.
voib tana ohtul, voib homme homikul.
Argo Tuulik 5:13 PM
Ausalt öeldes mulle tundub, et olukord on praegu nii segane, et seda on parem grupiviisliselt arutada. Ed on hea pingelangetaja. Ma tahaks, et tema ka ka juures oleks.
Denis 5:16 PM
tahtsin lihtsalt sobrana kokku saada. mitte tooasju arutada.
Argo Tuulik 5:21 PM
Ma arvan, et me peame tööasjad ära lahendama kõigepealt. Mul on raske töö- ja sõprussuhte piire tajuda muidu. Aga ma mõtlesin seda tõsiselt, kui ütlesin, et I don't hold a grudge. Miski nende kõneluste juures ei ole isiklik. Hea meelega tulen jalutama-arutama, kui oleme selle sõlme lahti arutanud
Denis 5:22 PM
Sinu soov on mulle seaduseks
Message Denis
5:05 Tõnis:
hey.
how are you time-wise today? i'd like to meet you face to face.
5:07
Argo:
I think it's too late today but I can come to the office tomorrow.
5:07
Tõnis:
i'd like to meet you outside the office. we could just walk in regent park for example.
it can be tonight, it can be tomorrow morning.
5:13
Argo
Honestly, the situation seems so confusing to me right now I would rather discuss this in a group-setting. Ed brings the tension down. I'd like him to be there too.
5:16
Tõnis
i just wanted to meet like friends. not discuss work stuff.
5:21
Argo:
I think we need to solve the work stuff first. Otherwise it's difficult for me to sense the boundaries of work and friendship. But I meant it when I said I don't hold a grudge. Nothing about these talks is personal. I'd be happy to come for a walk once we untie this knot :)
5:22
Tõnis
Your wish is my command :)

I didn't feel it as strongly back then but re-reading this now I feel anger rising over this "outside work", "tonight", "let's just meet like friends" approach. This is isolationist abuser-talk, creep-style. I have never been on a walk with Tõnis Haavel or friends with him. Or even alone with him since 2017 when we had a 'development talk' in the Tallinn office.

That moment onwards I felt uncomfortable being alone with him and I asked someone from HR to sit in in our future interactions.


Denis, Ed Tomasze...
3
Tuesday, July 4th
Friday, September 15th
Denis 6:53 AM
Morning @Argo Tuulik Argo. Do you have time today evening after work to have our 1:1?
I will come where you prefer to meet.
What time and place suits you?
Can do Saturday morning also, if you have other plans today.
3 replies Last reply 18 days ago
Monday, September 18th
Argo Tuulik 5:42 PM
Hi all!
Looks like the focus of this week is gonna be on getting everything we agreed on with writers in London down to easily digestable form for the other teams to work off.
I find it difficult to split my attention between these tasks and the talk Tõnis and I need to have so I scheduled us an hour on Friday between 15 and 16. Hope it works for you?
I would feel more comfortable if someone from the HR -- Grace maybe? -- would also be present. Would you agree to that Tõnis?
Ed, do you feel we also need to have a call this week? If so, we can also schedule something.
Have a good rest of the week!
Ed Tomaszewski 9:13 PM
Hey Argo - a call this week or next is purely your decision in case you want to discuss anything that wasn't directly addressed in our email thread. If it's not time sensitive and you wish to continue to be heads down on X7, we can catch up when I'm back in London next month (probably mid-month). Just let me know!
Tuesday, September 19th
Denis 11:54 AM
Hi @Argo Tuulik
I thought we can manage 1:1 but absolutely I have nothing against you asking HR there if that makes you feel more comfortable. Happy to have call with you in any case.
Argo Tuulik 6:05 PM
Alright, thank you @Denis! Talk to you on Friday!
@Ed, yes, let's postpone the catch-up a little bit and talk when you're back in London!
Message Denis, Ed Tomaszewski
Aa
Thread
Denis 19 days ago
Morning @Argo Tuulik Argo. Do you have time today evening after work to have our 1:1?
I will come where you prefer to meet.
What time and place suits you?
Can do Saturday morning also, if you have other plans today.
3 replies
Argo Tuulik 18 days ago
Morning Tõnis! Thanks for reaching out to me! This week's been mentally exhausting and there's still a lot of work to do today. I'll contact you on Monday and arrange the meeting.
Ed Tomaszewski 18 days ago
Hey Argo, I know you're slammed today (and exhausted). I'm around until 5pm today if you have a break before then. Can always do a call next week. Thanks!
Argo Tuulik 18 days ago
I think we'll still be working till 16 and then start shredding the papers. Let's have a call next week then.
Reply...
Also send to the group
Aa


19:43
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[redacted]
09:02
I mean it'd be a nerve wracking situation anyways, but if the only things that bind you to the company are your lead-producer contact and your minority shares that your girlfriend owns -- not your legal spouse, girlfriend -- then you gotta have a lot of trust to the guy you brought in, the majority shareholder, your brother in-law. Everybody know the relationship between a man and his brother in-law is sacred and eternal. Those never go wrong.
1
09:03
Twin-Lillies
And I feel like it's gotta be more than a small w...
100
09:04
[redacted]
lol argo 09:05
I imagine they are all mixed up in the shady shit and as we have heard from mulptile sources - Denis is vindictive 09:06
Message

Tõnis is known to be a vindictive man and I felt I had drawn his ire and that he was looking to put me in my place after I refused his 1–1 outside-of-office walks.

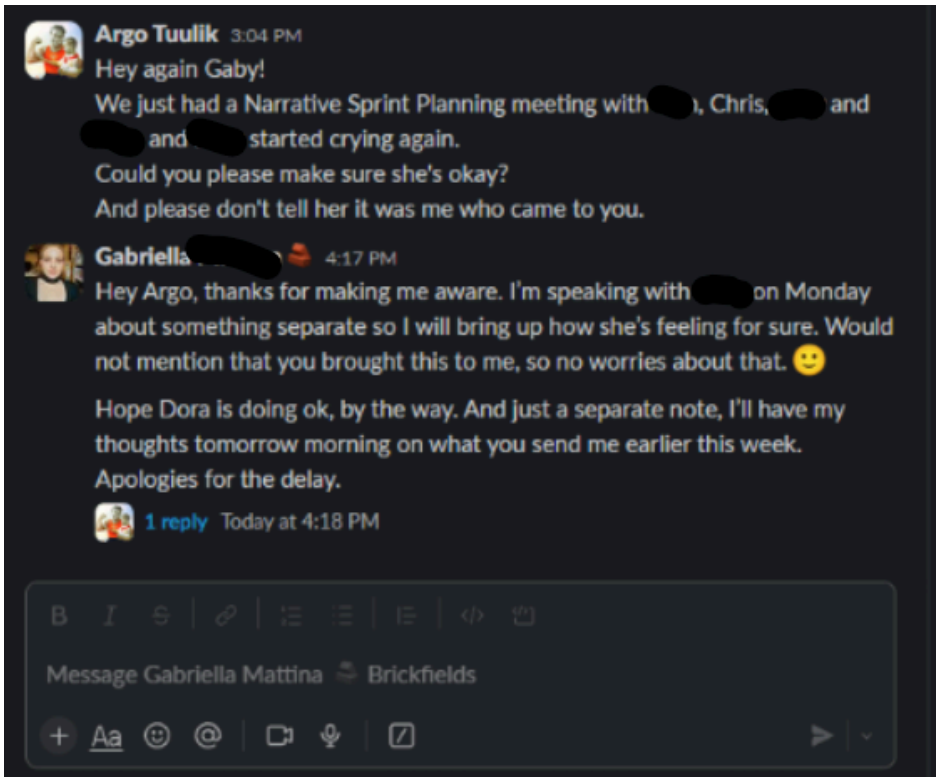
Describing X7 during the structure talks, the ups and downs—mostly the latter— the project went through between 2023 July and the end of November when we finished a 2h playable build for internal showcase is a multi hour ordeal in itself so I'll save it for another time.

Important to note is:

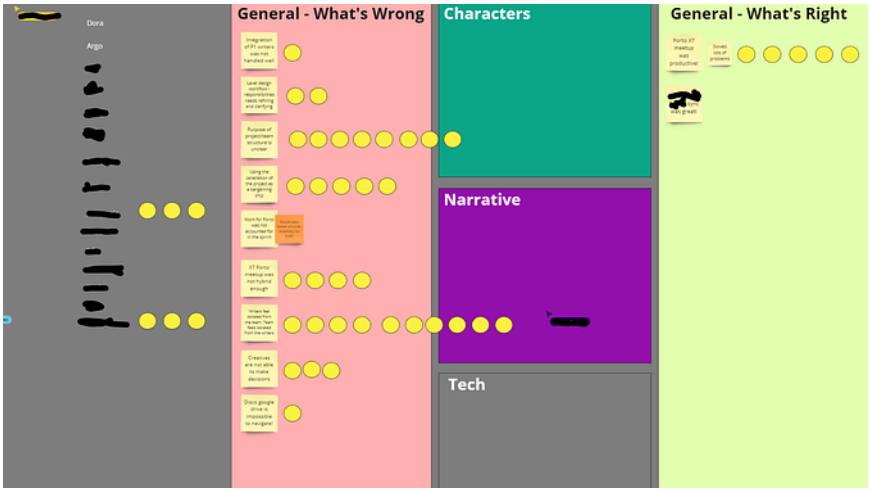
- X7 project absorbed most of the 'paused' P1 people. Few went to C4.
- While *technically* X7 writing team doubled in size the writing itself stopped completely. Production had assigned us a 2-month tutorialization period during which Dora and I were supposed to bring new writers up to speed. I've said in multiple interviews that at an average it took a Disco writer anywhere between 4 to 6 months to be able to write for Disco Elysium without supervision. I had learned even slower.
- Although the writing had grounded to a halt the other teams that had doubled in size were working twice as fast now. And predictably the problem of not being able to supply artists with briefs, designers with feedback, etc. grew ever more severe.
- In the background, Tõnis and the studios new president Ed Tomaszewski were trying to force into existence some kind of structure where Jim from cancelled P1 would become a writing team lead. Chris would be an interim lead for the other two new writers from P1 and Dora and I would essentially be just writers on the project. The problem was that they were afraid to communicate the new structure to the rest of X7 cause Dora and I were well liked and this announcement would have caused project-wide bad blood. So management kept stalling and forbade us to communicate anything to the team. I cannot even

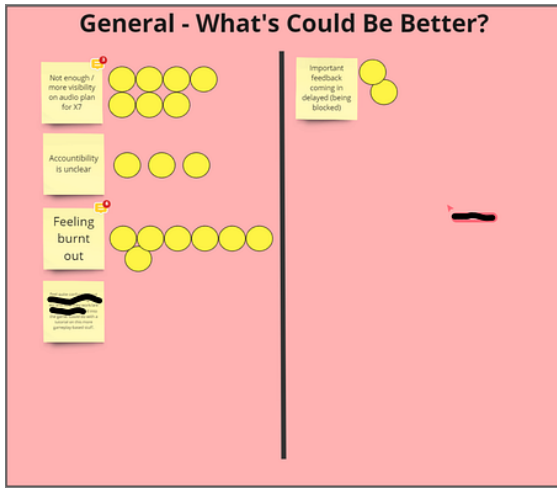
begin to describe the stress and isolation this forced silence brought not just to us but the entire X7 team.

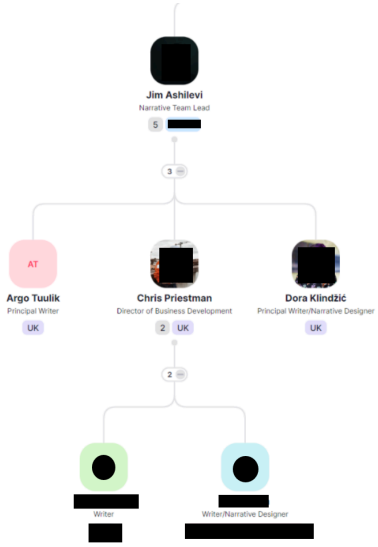
- People started complaining about burnout, feeling lost and communication issues on Retrospectives. Crying too.

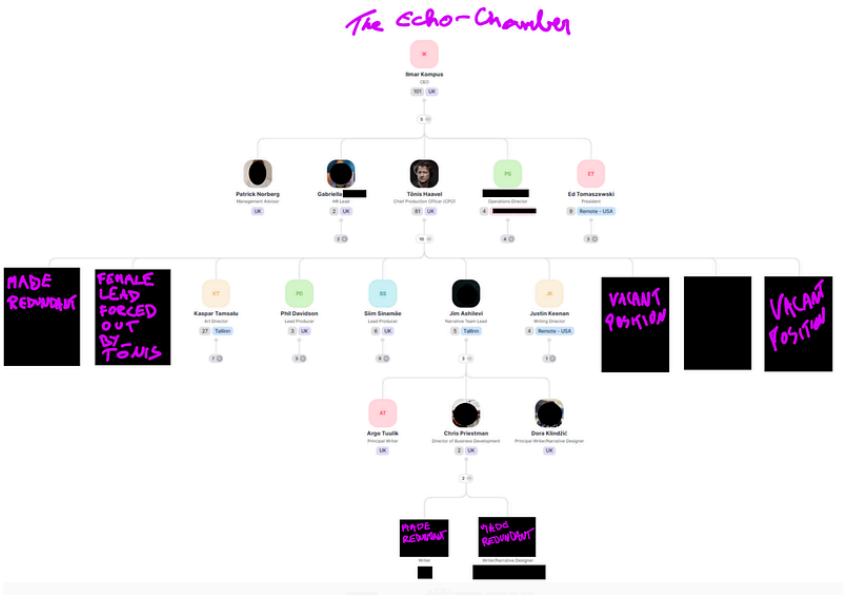

Argo Tuulik 3:04 PM
Hey again Gaby!
We just had a Narrative Sprint Planning meeting with , Chris, and
and started crying again.
Could you please make sure she's okay?
And please don't tell her it was me who came to you.
Gabriella 4:17 PM
Hey Argo, thanks for making me aware. I'm speaking with on Monday about something separate so I will bring up how she's feeling for sure. Would not mention that you brought this to me, so no worries about that.
Hope Dora is doing ok, by the way. And just a separate note, I'll have my thoughts tomorrow morning on what you send me earlier this week. Apologies for the delay.
1 reply Today at 4:18 PM
Message Gabriella Mattina Brickfields
Aa

- The two-month tutoring period for new writers—all wonderful, talented people—went on for four months. The communication inside the team was made extra difficult by Tõnis arbitrarily enforcing a rule that I am only allowed to give writing feedback to new writers through **Director of Business Development, Chris Priestman.** Priestman was then to pass it on and bring back whatever questions there might have been. Super-efficient system, I know.




General - What's Could Be Better?
Not enough / more visibility on audio plan for X7
Accountability is unclear
Feeling burnt out
Important feedback coming in delayed (being blocked)





Finally it seems like we've reached some kind of a structure. Not what ZAUM claims below but SOMETHING that's not this standstill limbo anymore. At last Dora and I are able to take a vacation. First since the one I took with Robert, Rostov, Helen and Yuan in Cornwall back in 2021 for me. First—and only— in Zaum, period, for Dora.

"After months of seemingly good faith work on X7's narrative team structure – Argo holding final writing approval, Argo confirming he did not want to be Game Director, and both Argo and Dora approving team roles – we received a proposal to replace that structure. We rejected it. We empower teams, not individuals; success is shared, not vested in one person."
ZA/UM Studio

Three days in Estonia, outside of crunch, outside of meetings about meetings, sprints, slack and Jira, after multiple full nights' sleep I see X7 with absolute clarity. **The project is completely fucked.** The team is already burning out and we're basically making a vertical slice still. Communication between teams is rerouted through a network of middle-men all reporting to Tõnis. Where once it took 5 minutes to hop on a call with someone and another 30 to quickly bang something out, it now is a two week ordeal where first you have to go to your lead who will then have a producer check everyone's schedules get back to the lead and then you… The inefficiency this introduced is indescribable. Every creative team on X7 was complaining about it. Quality was dropping left and right. Things didn't look, feel or read Elysium any more. There wasn't a single game-ready dialogue and some critical systems had not even been fully tested (and I speculated would need extensive rework). And everyone in my team was on the brink of exhaustion.

Since P1 was "paused" and C4 was still in its 2nd Great Reset, X7 seemed like the only chance the studio had. And I knew the only way X7 wouldn't collapse under its own weight was to take extreme measures immediately.

Back from the vacation I set up the meeting with Ed, Tõnis and Ilmar and proposed to downsize the team into a small agile spike team. I proposed myself as the official Game Director of X7 and as part of the spike team I included Robert and Rostov in consulting roles since ultimately I believe repairing that relationship is the only thing that

would save the studio from certain death. I also listed 22 people working on X7 the studio would have to find positions on different projects. If not I promised to personally make them redundant.

Gentlemen,

During my vacation, I had time to disconnect from the day-to-day runnings of the project and think about the way we did things on Disco, the way X7 was running for the first 4 months, and the way it is running now.

I also spent a lot of time thinking about my role in this project and the responsibility that comes with my seven years of experience.

All this contemplation finally materialized in the shape of this proposal I want to bring you this day.

Essentially, I want to make a commitment and take responsibility to make X7 a critical and financial success.

I am going to present to you what I want to commit to and what I need to make this a reality.

Argo Tuulik

4th September 2023

Deliverable

- Commitment to deliver the complete **First Draft** of the script for X7, with a minimum of **300,000 words** in **6 months** time with a small and agile team.
- Complete the **concepting** for the art, animation, and audio assets **for all Acts** in parallel with the script, so that in six months we have very clear goals for each of the disciplines.

Timeline:

- **Immediately**: X7 Team is restructured into a smaller, more agile "spike team".
  - Active development of non-narrative game assets beyond concept stage is paused.
- **Next 6 Months**: Intensive narrative-led script production with minimal distractions, supported and inspired by audiovisual concept art creation and agile systems prototyping.
  - **Progress meetings** between Game Director and Executive Producer at minimum once/week.
- Upon completion of First Draft, circa **March 2024**, narrative team switches focus to:
  - Script **editing**, polishing, re-writing.
  - Sub-team starts work on conceptualization and production of **marketing materials and strategies** (trailers, key art, sneak peeks, merchandise)
- At this point, production of **game assets** recommences at a rapid pace.
  - Previously redundant roles are restored; employees not retrenched are redeployed.
  - Retrenched employees offered right of first refusal.

Advantages of the "spike team":

- Significantly **faster pace of work** due to the ease of communication, reduction in meetings, etc.
- **Scriptwriting as the central driver** of game production ensures narrative quality is the priority.
  - The script is what makes everything else come together – it informs creative decisions for all the other teams.
- **Elysium veterans** don't need guidance or hand-holding – that goes to all departments.
- Everyone can be trusted to have meetings and **make decisions** without a lead or producer present.
- We already **know how to work together**, have a good workflow, good communication and don't need to wear silk gloves when talking to each other.
  - The last point is especially crucial in this stage, where we're setting down the tracks for future full-scale production. Bad ideas and stylistic *faux-pas* need to be addressed immediately, and amongst people who already trust each other, they *can* be.
- **Name value** of Disco veterans in credits.
  - Especially true for Robert Kurvits and Aleksander Rostov, even if lending their names is the only 'consulting' they end up doing for X7.
  - Advantages in winning back the good will of the community are obvious.
- Audio and visual **concepting** moves at the **same pace** as writing.
  - VO development, avoiding stylistic fiascos like Scotsman Scab Leader and the Jean Vicquemare 2 in DE.
- **Fast prototyping**, agile on-the-go changes, testing of systems.
  - Refining and further developing some of our less tested changes to the Disco formula.
    - New substances
    - Character switching in- and out of dialogue.
    - Dual inventory, charsheet, thought cabinet, chain thoughts, etc.

Now, as for everyone in the **Redundant Positions** list…

Lots of these people are working on multiple projects. Those people might either focus 100% of their time to these other projects or potentially be offered a part time solution.

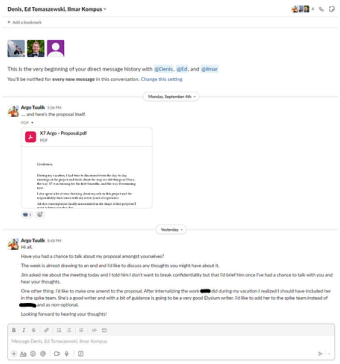
The people listed working exclusively on X7 for whom the studio doesn't see a position in any of the other projects I will personally let go or make redundant.

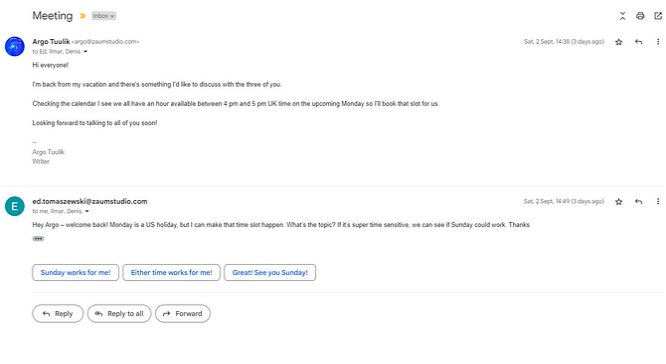
- In appreciation of their work so far, we could offer them the right of first refusal. If in six months we decided we have need for this role, it would be offered to them first.

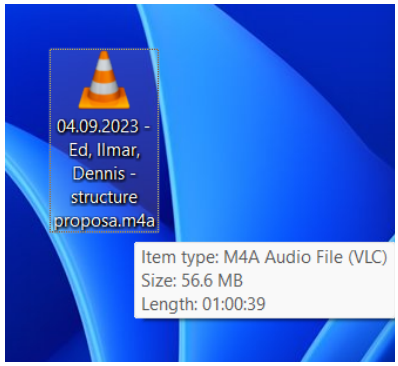
I joined ZA/UM in October 2016. Close to five years ago we released Disco Elysium to extraordinary critical acclaim and created a completely new sub-genre of role-playing games. In my seven years at this company, I've felt proud to be part of a team spearheading a new standard for narrative games. It is my dream for X7 to deliver on and push forward this narrative frontier. This proposal is the best chance I see for us to make this dream a reality.

Thank you for taking the time.

– *Argo*




Meeting
Argo Tuulik
Hi everyone!
I'm back from my vacation and there's something I'd like to discuss with the three of you.
Checking the calendar I see we all have an hour available between 4 pm and 5 pm UK time on the upcoming Monday so I'll book that slot for us.
Looking forward to talking to all of you soon!
Argo Tuulik
Writer
ed.tomaszewski@zaumstudio.com
Hey Argo – welcome back! Monday is a US holiday, but I can make that time slot happen. What's the topic? If it's super time sensitive, we can see if Sunday could work. Thanks
Sunday works for me!
Either time works for me!
Great! See you Sunday!
Reply
Reply to all
Forward



Unsurprisingly the management did *not* like my proposal. Who could have guessed?

RE: Meeting [X7 Proposal] Inbox ×

[redacted] Fri, Sep 8, 2023, 4:14 PM

to Argo, Ilmar, Denis

Hi Argo,
Ilmar, Denis, and I had a chance to discuss your proposal and I have collated our feedback below. I'm not going to bury the lede here – your proposal has been rejected. Due to the contents of your proposal and the potential negative impact on our team members, our studio reputation, and our community, we feel it is necessary to give a detailed, written response for the record.

This is going to read overly dramatic; the way that you react to this feedback is going to set the tone for the rest of your career. You might not believe it, but I genuinely care about your future, both here and beyond.

I don't believe you fully understand the ramifications of this proposal, even just the mere existence of it. If this proposal was discussed or shown to more members of the team, it would cause an uproar that would rival prior members' departures. You would be vilified by other team members, whether you put them on your redundancy list or not. I can't imagine that a significant number of people here would now want to work with you. Would you work with someone who would advocate for firing most the team after coming back from vacation? If this proposal was made public, it would give the community and our fans the impression that we are so creatively desperate that we cannot survive without our former team members, who are still in active litigation, Robert and Rostov. I hope one day we are on neutral or even good terms with them, but that day is not today. The important details that are lacking here are that Robert and Rostov have their own company, have a demanding investor, need to build a team, all on top of Robert having to rehab his image after his public display with PMG. It would also give the public perception that we are OK with the behavior they exhibited here.

Now, if there was an existential issue with a game project, it is up to a team of subject matter experts / discipline leaders to come together to agree on the problem and collaborate on potential solutions - involving the team and certain non-game teams like Finance - to then discuss with management for approval to implement the proposed solution. This isn't to say that concerns cannot be raised by those who aren't discipline leads; however, they shouldn't bypass them. Certain existential issues might necessitate redundancies but as we discussed around the P1 pause, that is an absolute last resort.

As I've mentioned to you before, we are here to empower teams, not individuals. We all share the burden of responsibility to make our projects successful. It's not just one person. While I know this was not your intention to emulate Robert, Ilmar reminded me of the time when Robert - toward the end of his tenure - despite having previously agreed to the team structure, he asked for him and a close-knit team to go off and work on a sequel alone because only he could fix the issues with it.

Overall, your proposal lacks coherence across important disciplines such as production, finance, legal, HR, PR/Publishing, and overall organizational structure. On the last point, it is very concerning you've demoted Justin from Narrative Director to a Jr Writer, you terminated Jim (your direct manager) from the team while asking [redacted] to be VO director despite Jim's demonstrated expertise on Disco, installed [redacted] as an Art Director which is outside his discipline, and recommended Robert's and Rostov's return. The rationale for bringing together people you're friendly with but who lack the experience is worrisome. As you described on your call, not having to watch what you or others say to avoid hurting feelings is not an appropriate basis for team formation. There is no excuse for devolving to interactions that may negatively impact others' mental well-being.
In aggregate, we have all spent hundreds of hours working through the narrative team structure over the last few months. The project has suffered because of lack of narrative input. While I wish it didn't take up that much time, it was a collaborative effort which resulted in an unanimously agreed upon structure prior to your vacation.
In my opinion, this is how you could have approached this differently:

- You had a life altering event in your personal life which changed your worldview and how you want to control your future. After saying that you did not want to be a director and even offering to cede final say on X7's writing, you now want to be a Game Director. Coming to us with that desire and asking as to how that could happen, we could work together on a plan which would include hitting certain personal developmental milestones. The ultimate goal would be for you to serve as a Game Director on the next project, I believe that's a realistic and achievable goal.
- You need help / guidance from ZA/UM team members outside the X7 team. For example, Justin. As I've mentioned before, the global narrative team needs to be on good terms so that you can all collaborate effectively. I'm sure we can get you and Justin to a place where he can carve out time to be a resource, but certainly not as a junior writer like you suggested.
- You're lacking certain skills which need to be augmented from outside the team. You've said publicly and privately that you are in awe of Robert's mastery of world-building. Let's discuss how we can assist you in that area, but it won't involve Robert.
- You have concerns about progress or the direction of other disciplines, these can be messaged to Jim for further discussion and investigation with the help of other disciplines.
- Note: Under the right circumstances, we might be able to bring back other former team members (e.g. [redacted] and [redacted]) but there could be challenges there.

So, where do we go from here? Here are the options we need to discuss:

1. Continue with the mutually agreed upon narrative team structure. As described above, you work with Jim and the team to address the skills gaps that you believe you have or lack in the team (e.g., the need for world-building assistance).
2. Your role transitions to an advisor on X7 while working solo on a pitch for a new concept. That team would get augmented over time as you clear certain development milestones. Discuss bringing in a professional coach to help with leadership and communication (note: this could also be in #1 and #3).
3. Same as #2 but you decide to not be involved in X7 in any capacity.

You've denied involving anyone else in the preparation of this proposal, you've also denied that this proposal needs to be enacted or you'll resign. If you want to know which option I prefer, it's #1. As I said from our very first meeting on this topic, I want us to have open and honest discussions so we can best figure out how to solve all our challenges.

I understand this is a pivotal moment for you. If you have any reservations or alternative suggestions, please don't hesitate to share them. We're here to support and understand each other. I can appreciate this is a lot of feedback to digest. I will be in London next week and we can all discuss further in person but it cannot be at the expense of the X7 writing team meetings.

Best,
Ed

Ed-care. Cared by Ed.

And just like that it was once again time to return to work in the shit factory.

If you only read one thing from this entire post, read my reply to Ed below. It's long but it covers most of the challenges the studio and X7

were facing at the time, why X7 sank, and it was written from the heart back when I still believed Ed Tomaszewski is a decent guy.

From: Argo Tuulik <argo@zaumstudio.com>
Sent: Sunday, September 10, 2023 8:27:46 PM
To: [redacted]
Subject: Re: Meeting [X7 Proposal]

P(re)S(criptum): I started writing a reply to your letter at 9AM Sunday morning and now as I finish it it's 01 AM, Monday I have gone through a pack of red Marlborough.
I understand it is a long read so let me just answer the question you asked so you can read the rest of this at your own pace whenever you get the chance and we can have a discussion sometime later this week.
I chose option number one, continuing X7 with the mutually agreed Narrative Team Structure. Scroll down for a more detailed reply.

Hi Ed!

First of all I want to sincerely thank you for taking the time to give me such a detailed response. I am aware it must have taken a lot of time and focus and I want you to know how much I appreciate the effort.
I also appreciate you expressing that you care about my future – I genuinely believe you are a good, competent guy and your involvement in the chaos of the last four months has given me so much hope and strength. I really do mean it!

Your letter was so thorough and well structured I'm gonna respond to some of the points you made paragraph by paragraph and then add some of my own thoughts down below.

"I don't believe you fully understand the ramifications of this proposal, even just the mere existence of it. If this proposal was discussed or shown to more members of the team, it would cause an uproar that would rival prior members' departures. You would be vilified by other team members, whether you put them on your redundancy list or not. I can't imagine that a significant number of people here would now want to work with you. Would you work with someone who would advocate for firing most the team after coming back from vacation? If this proposal was made public, it would give the community and our fans the impression that we are so creatively desperate that we cannot survive without our former team members, who are still in active litigation, Robert and Rostov. I hope one day we are on neutral or even good terms with them, but that day is not today. The important details that are lacking here are that Robert and Rostov have their own company, have a demanding investor, need to build a team, all on top of Robert having to rehab his image after his public display with PMG. It would also give the public perception that we are OK with the behavior they exhibited here."

The ramifications of my proposal. You are absolutely correct to assume I don't fully understand what they are. What the ramifications would be in terms of the company's public image, finances, production schedules etc -- I can only guess. Internally as well, I can imagine it would cause a storm both inside and outside of X7. However I don't want to leave you with the impression that I didn't give it much thought or didn't consider the cost of my relationships in the studio or my own reputation. On the contrary, I thought about it long and hard. You probably remember from our call that I never asked for confidentiality. When I made the decision to submit the proposal to you, Tõnis and Ilmar, I accepted that every single one of the people in the redundancy list is going to be made aware of my proposal whether the management chooses to pursue it or not. I also faced the fact that should the proposal move forward I am going to be the one looking these people in the eye and delivering the news. And to say it was a painful thought would be an understatement. Telling [redacted] that I put [redacted] in the redundancy list -- awful thought! People like [redacted] -- I consider these people my friends. And despite everything that's gone down I still consider Jim and Chris my friends as well. Even putting [redacted] and [redacted] as 'optional' is heartbreaking to me. And these are just the people I have a closer relationship with. Purely from an emotional, compassionate perspective not a single person there deserves to be made redundant. But it wasn't about being a good friend or a colleague. It was about what I believe is best for the project. Understanding that gave me resolve to come forward with what I believe is not just best for our small project but for the entire studio, the 100+ people working here and ZA/UM's future in the video game industry.

You ask me if I would work with someone who comes back from the vacation and proposes something so radical and my answer is yes, if it's for the better of many at the cost of the few then I would find the humility and compassion in myself not to hate the person who made that call. I don't expect everyone -- or anyone really -- to share my feelings on that matter but I hope I've answered your question.

You point out the circumstances surrounding Rostov and Robert -- them having their hands full with other matters at the moment and the current relationship between them and the studio.
To this I want to say that even when making the proposal I understood that without extending the production period by at least another year we simply don't have enough time to bring them on in key-roles. That's why they were titled as contractors (consultants). During our call I also pointed out that even if the only thing they lend to the project is their name, that itself would be invaluable. I stand by that. Think about it Ed, think of the public's reaction when the studio could release a statement saying we're working on mending the relationship with Rostov and Kurvits. And then think ahead to the future. Think about the roar of excitement going through the entire industry if we could actually fix the relationship. To err is human, to forgive -- divine. Personally I think if we approached Rostov and Robert they'd tell us to go fuck ourselves but someone has to take the first step and then the ball would be in their court. And although their initial reaction would likely be negative then they'd be fools not to think about it. I've said it before, I don't think Rostov did anything wrong and I believe anyone -- including Robert -- deserves a second chance. And again, even if in the end their response is a resolute 'no' then we have shown to the community that we want to make things right. Want to put The Hammer back together (a "Breaking Bad" reference).

Now to wrap this paragraph up, do I understand you correctly that you don't want me to share my proposal with the team? Not even Jim?

make things right. Want to put The Hammer back together (a "Breaking Bad" reference).

Now to wrap this paragraph up, do I understand you correctly that you don't want me to share my proposal with the team? Not even Jim? Like I said in slack, Jim asked me about the meeting I had with the management and I told him I don't want to break confidentiality, giving you, Ilmar and Tõnis time to think about it. I assumed that no matter what your decision is gonna be, you would either tell Jim yourself or give me the green light to be honest with him.
If your wish is that I keep this from Jim and anyone else in the team then of course, I will. The last thing I want is to unnecessarily destabilize the team who are already trying their very hardest to keep this project on course.

"Now, if there was an existential issue with a game project, it is up to a team of subject matter experts / discipline leaders to come together to agree on the problem and collaborate on potential solutions - involving the team and certain non-game teams like Finance - to then discuss with management for approval to implement the proposed solution. This isn't to say that concerns cannot be raised by those who aren't discipline leads; however, they shouldn't bypass them. Certain existential issues might necessitate redundancies but as we discussed around the P1 pause, that is an absolute last resort."

I'll come back to the existential issues further below when I get to my own thoughts but I wanna address your point that such issues should be brought up to the matter experts/discipline leads who can then agree on the problem and together look for solutions, bring it to the management etc.
You seem to forget that I am one of the subject matter experts. Comparing the Disco credits and our current employee roster I dare to say that I am one of the more competent matter experts left. As far as creative expertise goes I'd say I am the most competent matter expert by seniority alone. Yet I feel like the management has shadowbanned me since I spoke out on the creative quality of C4 in early 2022 and was subsequently removed from the project.

(Still haven't gotten a public (internal) apology nor even acknowledgement from the management that such course of action was wrong, even though many senior employees including [redacted] and Tõnis himself have acknowledged the fact that C4 was a far cry from the level of quality ZA/UM is known for and the project has since gone through two restarts, now including many of the changes I proposed back in July 2022.)

Also, as for other matter experts... X7 didn't even really have an Art Director until [redacted] took over the position in August right before I left for a vacation. And yes, on paper Kaspar was and still is the Art Director, but if you talked to the art team then you know that everyone there was struggling due to his lack of involvement and apparent motivation.

In general I feel we have a crisis of matter experts in the studio and I will further elaborate down below in the 'Existential problems' section.

I wanna wrap this paragraph up by saying that other than you Ed I don't know who to go to when I see glaring problems. And that is not to say we don't have enough Discipline Leads. It's more that communication with the Discipline Leads is hindered to the extreme and information brought to them seems to bear little to no consequence.
Also, you, Ilmar and Tõnis have all personally told me (some of you repeatedly) that if I have a problem I can come to you. I took this to heart.

"As I've mentioned to you before, we are here to empower teams, not individuals. We all share the burden of responsibility to make our projects successful. It's not just one person. While I know this was not your intention to emulate Robert, Ilmar reminded me of the time when Robert - toward the end of his tenure - despite having previously agreed to the team structure, he asked for him and a close-knit team to go off and work on a sequel alone because only he could fix the issues with it."

Ed, I could not agree with you more when you say it's important to empower the teams and not the individuals and I'll address this point further down when I get to the part about my role as the director of the project. I also thought long and hard about the composition of this Spike Team and the list of people I put there (plus [redacted] I added a few days later) is the team I believe could pull this off and the team I want to empower.

Right now I wanted to address the parallel drawn between my proposal and Roberts plan for Y12's pre production. The similarities are obvious, no argument there. However there is one important difference. Two actually when you consider the timeline. Not sure who said that, Kaspar or Justin, but supposedly had Robert said that he'd take a small team off to do pre-production for anywhere between three to seven years. What I proposed is that we form a spike team who in six months will deliver the first draft of the entire script of the game. During the call I also added that a minimum weekly communication with the executive producer -- Tõnis -- is a crucial element of that proposal. Script is the most important thing in the type of game we're making. Script is our core gameplay loop. Without the script we don't have a game. In our current situation where no writing has been done for nearly six months and, much like communism in Disco, 0.00000001% of the estimated [redacted] word script is written, I think we can't seriously compare these two proposals. A 6 month period with a clearly defined success criteria and tight production oversight is really not the same as a proposal to disappear for an undefined amount of time to do pre production, don't you think?

"Overall, your proposal lacks coherence across important disciplines such as production, finance, legal, HR, PR/Publishing, and overall organizational structure. On the last point, it is very concerning you've demoted Justin

and tight production oversight is really not the same as a proposal to disappear for an undefined amount of time to do pre production, don't you think?

"Overall, your proposal lacks coherence across important disciplines such as production, finance, legal, HR, PR/Publishing, and overall organizational structure. On the last point, it is very concerning you've demoted Justin from Narrative Director to a Jr Writer, you terminated Jim (your direct manager) from the team while asking Mikee to be VO director despite Jim's demonstrated expertise on Disco, installed Leo as an Art Director which is outside his discipline, and recommended Robert's and Rostov's return. The rationale for bringing together people you're friendly with but who lack the experience is worrisome. As you described on your call, not having to watch what you or others say to avoid hurting feelings is not an appropriate basis for team formation. There is no excuse for devolving to interactions that may negatively impact others' mental well-being.

In aggregate, we have all spent hundreds of hours working through the narrative team structure over the last few months. The project has suffered because of lack of narrative input. While I wish it didn't take up that much time, it was a collaborative effort which resulted in a unanimously agreed upon structure prior to your vacation."

Of course my proposal lacks cross-disciplinary coherence, how could it not? Production, finances, legal, HR, PR/Publishing, organisational structures -- I know about as much about them as about non-linear algorithms or saturation diving. Not my areas of expertise and nothing made it more glaringly obvious than trying to understand the 'collective consultation' rules when making 20 or more people redundant in the UK. However in order to reach an acceptable level of coherency I would have had to consult other people and just like when I spoke out against the C4 pitch in June last year, I realized it can only be me alone. Otherwise the studio heads could interpret this as me forming some kind of an uprising. I also thought that by presenting this proposal to you, Ilmar and Tõnis would open the door to these conversations and you would be the ones bringing this cross-disciplinary expertise I lack to the table.

Now the people in my proposal that caused you concern...

Justin -- I think the success of this project and by proxy the studio as whole is more important than individual egos. I have forgiven Justin for the injustice(!) on C4. I repeat, the success of the studio is bigger than either of us, bigger than any individual. However I do realize he might still harbor some resentment so in the proposed orgchart I placed him under [redacted] to avoid triggering any positional insecurities. Like I said during our call the other, arguably more important reason for that was the fact he and [redacted] work fantastically together. They've been friends for a long time, they understand each other's working methodology and that collaboration produced very good results on Disco as well. In addition, like I said on the call, I understand that asking this from him is asking for a favor. And I intend to fully repay this favor by helping him take C4 to the level of quality expected from ZA/UM. I didn't include him in the Spike Team to humiliate him. I put him there to extend my hand in forgiveness, forge peace and to make both of our projects successful.

I didn't think of enlisting Justin's help as a demotion nor that it would require a change in his title. Many of our people work on multiple projects. Chris Priestman's official title is Director of Business Development yet his direct lead is the Narrative Team Lead, Jim.

Also because C4 already has a solid writing lead -- [redacted] -- who I myself vetted and greenlit during the extensive hiring process back in the end of 2021, I felt that asking Justin's help with our much smaller project for the next 6 months wouldn't be overly destabilizing for C4.

Jim -- I've said it before and I keep saying it; I consider Jim a good friend, someone I admire on so many levels. However after Jim came to me and Dora for writing advice for P1 a few months before Pioneer was paused and the questions he asked could be summed up by 'How do you make a video game?', I realized that he has a lot to learn. I am more than happy to teach him everything I know but this has to wait till the Spike Team has finished their job. Otherwise the pace of the project would be negatively impacted. Also with such a small and agile team I think any managerial duties Jim could perform could also be performed by Kosmos who I requested as the producer. In addition Kosmos is also a really good fully developed writer, has the experience of working on Disco both as a writer and producer and would in my opinion be a much better candidate for the role.
In short: I didn't see a role in the Spike Team for Jim that didn't slow the project down. But I would absolutely like to work with him after the six month spike period wraps and/or on future projects. I have no doubt the Studio would find other use for his talents for the next six months.

[redacted] -- I put [redacted] in the role of the art director because he is an artist through and through. He's a published musician, artist, designer and multi-talent. A true renaissance man. For the duration of the next six months it wouldn't matter if he has the technical skills Kaspar has for example. I want him to collaborate and guide [redacted] and [redacted] because he knows what an Elysium game feels, sounds, looks and plays like. He's humble, friendly, creative, and hard-working. He's the perfect person for the job!
Not to mention that [redacted], Dora, and I started X7, and for the first 4 months when it was just us the project moved at a rapid pace and most of the work that still makes our colleagues react with such excitement to every presentation we've done on X7 is from that four-month period. [redacted] is the best candidate for this position. And after this six month Spike period we could re-enlist [redacted] to either help him or even take over as the art lead. [redacted] is not about power, he's about art -- I'm sure if the Studio would explain this arrangement to him he would see the reason and would agree.

One person you didn't mention but I wanted to bring up because during our call someone (Ilmar?) said that this maneuver would be incredibly destabilizing for C4. It's Kosmos. I don't have to sell Kosmos to you, you know the guy's a superstar. He's working as a producer on C4 at the moment, yes, but the studio has an abundance of producers. For the next six months you could easily replace Kosmos on C4 with [redacted], Phil or -- my personal favorite producer, [redacted](any team would be lucky to have [redacted]!).

Me wanting to bring Rostov and Kurvits on X7 I already spoke about in length. But with great sadness I wanna add that I am not on friendly terms with either of them. Our friendship did not survive the calamities of their departure and I think me doing the PMG interview burned the last bridge. Nevertheless I will never have anything but respect for them. Creativity like they possess comes around once in a century if even that.
As to your point that they are lacking expertise I have to ask what kind of expertise? People management? I can believe that but people management is a learnable skill, talent isn't.
And who do you think is more of an expert when it comes to making an Elysium game than Robert Kurvits and Aleksander Rostov? If you'll excuse my contemporary reference, to me that's like saying that J. Robert Oppenheimer was lacking expertise in nuclear physics.

To your next point that a team shouldn't be formed on the basis that anyone can say anything without consequences I say yes, I absolutely agree. However, that was not the point. My point was that in a small team where everyone already knows and trusts each other there is a much smaller likelihood of people misunderstanding each other. Trust being the key-word here. I trust that every person whose name I put in the spike team is emotionally responsible and respectful to others' feelings, therefore if an idea or a concept isn't fitting for the project everyone would understand that rejecting the idea is not rejecting them as a team member. I feel that when a project grows to a certain size this trust and comfort is hard to maintain. That's just basic Small Project VS Large Project math. Communication becomes more difficult. I am not afraid of bullies in the project, our community does not stand them, I am afraid we grow so large people aren't talking to each other any more.

Also, can I just point out that your line...

"As you described on your call, not having to watch what you or others say to avoid hurting feelings is not an appropriate basis for team formation. There is no excuse for devolving to interactions that may negatively impact others' mental well-being."

... reads a little hypocritical after what Tõnis and Phil did to me on that structure talks call. Let alone that it came at the expense of inter-departmental relationships that we had spent six weeks building. It was not okay. I told you that it was worse than anything I ever witnessed Robert doing, and you let them both off with a 'stern talking'. Still haven't heard a sincere apology from either of them by the way, even after I reported this to [redacted] in HR.

"You had a life altering event in your personal life which changed your worldview and how you want to control your future. After saying that you did not want to be a director and even offering to cede final say on X7's writing, you now want to be a Game Director. Coming to us with that desire and asking as to how that could happen, we could work together on a plan which would include hitting certain personal developmental milestones. The ultimate goal would be for you to serve as a Game Director on the next project, I believe that's a realistic and achievable goal."

Yes, I had a life-altering event. I had to stand up to my father because I saw that if I'm not going to do it he's just going to keep coming after my mum. My inactivity would cause others suffering. Having to ask him "Are you not ashamed of yourself? Is this what you think an honourable man would do?" and finally seeing genuine shame, tears and regret in his eyes changed me. I realized how easy it is to see injustice, wrong-doings in front of your very eyes and just turn away. I've always turned away. But there in that moment I understood that I am the only one who can stop it. And after facing that responsibility once I can never turn away again.
No matter how many times I tell you that I don't want to be a game director I don't think I can get the reality of it across. We come from such different worlds, you and I. I don't want to do it, but there is no one left in the studio who understands Elysium and what an Elysium game is as well as I do. And you have no idea how much that terrifies me, because it means all the better people are gone. It's up to Private Eddie Slovik now. I don't want to do it, but I can't just look away when something that's so dear to me is run to the ground by people to whom Elysium is just a product.

I will not come to you with a desire to be a game director because I don't want to be a game director. All I want is to work in a team that is genuinely excited about the project and feel the bliss of collectively dreaming up something that can proudly call itself art. Whatever the next project is, I hope someone better than me takes that responsibility. I am happy being just a writer.

As for X7, like I said during our call, I am more than happy for [redacted] to be the game director. The problem being that she's employed by a

As for X7, like I said during our call, I am more than happy for [redacted] to be the game director. The problem being that she's employed by a different studio. But if you can somehow make that happen, get her to our team, I am 100% on board following her command. Same goes to Rostov.

"So, where do we go from here? Here are the options we need to discuss:

1. *Continue with the mutually agreed upon narrative team structure. As described above, you work with Jim and the team to address the skills gaps that you believe you have or lack in the team (e.g., the need for world-building assistance).*
2. *Your role transitions to an advisor on X7 while working solo on a pitch for a new concept. That team would get augmented over time as you clear certain development milestones. Discuss bringing in a professional coach to help with leadership and communication (note: this could also be in #1 and #3).*
3. *Same as #2 but you decide to not be involved in X7 in any capacity."*

The options you proposed... It's pretty simple. I will continue working with the mutually agreed narrative team structure. I'm not a quitter and I will fight with tooth and nail to make X7 a success.
Not gonna deny that seeing option number 2 sent a wave of relief over me. But the thing is I've already been there a year ago. When I was sacked from C4 this is exactly what happened. Me and Dora were given the liberty of coming up with a new concept with two limitations: 1) Has to be an Elysium game. 2) Has to be a Disco expansion. We did it under extreme stress due to the events happening both inside and outside of the Studio and the result was greeted with unanimous excitement by our colleagues. Then management got involved, installed new leadership and pushed us back to a position where I am afraid to even voice my concerns lest they be seen as insurgence. It really hasn't been a great experience Ed.

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The thing with consulting is that I wouldn't feel less responsible if I were further away. I'd just be even less capable of influencing things and I think it would hurt more to see things going wrong. Right now I can at least push myself to do the absolute best writing and shape the narrative.
I do appreciate your offer of coaching. Let's talk about what that would actually mean once we've delivered X7. I don't think I'm in a position right now where I could split my attention between the two. Besides I'm not sure if you think it's still a worthy investment of time and money if I don't want to direct future projects.

One more last section. The existential problems. I will try to make this as brief as possible and hope this list may serve as talking points when we have time to sit down and discuss things in London. And yes, I absolutely understand that these discussions can't be at the expense of X7 writing team meetings so I'm more than happy to talk to you about this stuff outside the normal working hours.

EXISTENTIAL PROBLEMS

The way I see it, the things that I look at as 'existential problems' can be roughly divided into two categories. The problems inside the Studio and the problems on X7. I'll start with the first category although there is bound to be overlap.

*** Scaling up too fast** -- I remember you pointing that out to me as well so no point in going into it much deeper right now. Going from a studio with 30 people to a studio with 100+ people in the span of one year is in some ways even more radical than my Spike Team proposal in my opinion.

*** Not sticking with what we know** -- With Disco Elysium we created a completely new sub-genre of CRPG's. It took 5 years to develop, was an unprecedented critical success and did something that lots of critically successful games never come close to -- made its measly budget of c.a 7 million euros back tenfold. Considering that we are the only Studio in the business who has this particular know-how we basically have a monopoly in this subgenre. Why not do what From Software did, keep reiterating and improving the formula while telling new literary-quality stories? I repeat, no one in the industry does what we do. Everyone who's tried to emulate us so far have demonstrated they don't really understand what made Disco great.
But the critical part of that plan is using the know-how we acquired over the years. How can we expect to get the same or even similar results if we use completely different methodology? Why would we switch to trying to emulate the way things are done in other studios if we are the only ones with a metacritic score of 97%?
I absolutely agree that there were many things we did wrong on Disco but a lot was done right. Why are we scrapping the entire production system that brought us that unprecedented success and replacing it with Agile Production that's almost universally hated in the industry?

*** Agile Production** -- I think it's a great approach if you're making a parking app or a platformer or a shooter or a myriad of other games where narrative is not the core. But it doesn't work for us. None of the creative people are happy with it because that's not how creativity works. You can't chop it down into bitesized bits and then just start doing the individual bit with the intent of connecting them later. Creativity is inherently chaotic and I understand there needs to be a structure but we are at a point where all there *is* is structure. Creativity does not thrive under an authoritarian regime and I feel that currently the management is prioritizing these authoritarian structures and conveyor belt production methodology above creativity, above people's motivation, inspiration, and mental health.

*** Lack of transparency and/or communication** - this is such an expansive topic I have no hope of covering it here today. I'll just briefly mention some instances to illustrate what I mean.

* Earlier I mentioned shadowbanning. What I meant is that no one from the management has ever talked to me about why my expertise isn't appreciated. Instead I've been removed from slack groups -- sometimes an identical slack group is created without me in it instead -- as well as meetings and discussions over important creative topics. For at least six months now I've known there are regular meetings between Tõnis, Phil sometimes Chris, lately Jim as well, where project-critical (X7) topics are being discussed, and no one has ever even mentioned it to me even though I (and Dora) had effectively directed X7 from the beginning and were only recently demoted to Principal Writers.

* My removal from C4 is another example. 8 months later people who joined X7 still didn't know what had happened and were afraid to ask.

* Going back even further... The decision to abandon the way we did things on Disco has never been communicated. Instead little by little, protocol by protocol, Agile Production has taken over. I understand why that is because a lot of people wouldn't have agreed to this change had it been properly communicated but I still think the people who made Disco deserved to know that the Studio wants to start doing things completely differently. Then they could've made an informed decision if they want it or go with something less corporate.

* Then there is the way incorporating the new management structure on X7 was conducted. When Chris Priestman was brought on board the team was never really informed of what his role was. Some people were told he's the project lead, some that he's just there to help. His official title was Director of Business Development but he was also placed under me and Dora -- at least in creative decisions. Production told me that Dora, Chris and I are all equally running the project but in meetings where we weren't present producers referred to him as the project lead. I think someone also referred to him as Product Owner at some point, then Creative Director. Can you see how frustratingly confusing that is? The X7 team repeatedly spoke out about it during retros as well and I assume that's what initiated the Narrative Team Structure Talks.
This cleared some things up but introduced a new layer of confusion. If Dora and I are Principal Writers and Chris is a Senior Writer then why are the two junior writers, [redacted] and [redacted] placed under Chris in the hierarchy? Not arguing against the structure just pointing out how confusing that is even from the inside. Imagine trying to make sense of this when you're in the art team.
And then Jim is made the Narrative Team Lead. Again looking at it from outside of the Narrative team one is bound to ask why is the Writing Director of the paused P1 project now running X7 Narrative team? It gets more confusing I imagine when you add that while he is running the Narrative team he is not the one making creative decisions -- that's what Argo does.
And then naturally comes the question if Jim's the Narrative Team lead then who's the Creative Director? Wait... No one is the Creative Director? But then who makes sure that music, art, writing, animations, UX, UI, systems, design all work together?
I recently learned that without communicating this to the team Tõnis has become the Product Owner. Is that synonym for Creative Director without actually saying the word?

Then I've got to ask, has any of this structure even been communicated to the rest of the team? Was it done when I was on vacation? I'm getting the feeling that people on X7 don't understand what's going on and it's creating project-wide anxiety.

* And another thing... Remember the first meeting in our series of Narrative Team Structure talks? The one in the London studio? I can't get rid of the gnawing feeling that you, Tõnis, Phil, Chris, Jim -- basically everyone in that room but me and Dora -- already knew what the structure should be and the aim of these talks was to get us to suggest Jim as the team lead instead. You don't have to confirm or deny, I just remember the moment in that meeting when I said that I never actually thought about switching to full time directing but if that's what the project needs I will, and the expression on everyone's faces signaling that this is not the right answer. I might be just imagining it but even that fact that I do is a sign of lack of directness. Had you just told me this is how it's gonna be -- like it was with integrating the P1 writers -- I would have not liked it, but ultimately we would have saved twelve weeks of production time we spent in those meetings.

I'd like to see more transparency and directness in these kinds of matters.

Existential problems on X7 are largely the same.

* Scaling up too fast -- asset production started before we even started with the Narrative Overview and because like on C4 we completely skipped pre production on X7, the writing team has been desperately trying to catch up with other disciplines. Not just trying to catch up either, other teams have grown a lot in size -- that was true even before incorporating people from paused P1. All the while my requests for additional writers were largely ignored until P1's integration. Now we are in a situation where other disciplines are so far ahead our main task is to feed them with work. Basically we have to quickly come up and oversee characters and story elements that we haven't even had time to properly discuss just so the other teams have something to do. Naturally this has caused a huge drop in quality. Both in writing and art assets. Things no longer look, feel or even read Elysium. And yes, it's good that in addition to myself, Dora and Chris we now have [redacted] and Jim in the team, but Jim doesn't write, [redacted] has a very good literary style but she's still very much in the learning phase when it comes to structure (also works only four days a week), Chris requires a lot of editing and for [redacted] Jim is looking for other -- more structural -- things to do [redacted].

At the same time Phil announced that Content Completion is due by July 2024 the latest and that production wants to start recording VO in March. As of today we have maybe 5% of the entire script written in any shape or form -- at least half of that 5% is unusable unless we want to be the laughing stock of the gaming industry. And I repeat, script is the most important thing. Script is the skeleton every other discipline attaches their work to.

I know you don't like that I came forth with this radical Spike Team proposal but can you at least understand where I'm coming from when I say that we need to take decisive steps if we want to put something out in the last quarter of 2024?

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Thank you if you read this far. I write because I care. Maybe more than anyone. And believe me the irony of the fact that is the most writing I've done on X7 in the last 5 months is not lost on me.

One last thing... You were understandably upset that I didn't tell you in advance what this Proposal call was going to be about. I want to apologise for that. I thought about it and I wish I had given you more of a heads-up. The main reason why I didn't was something Tõnis told me. "Whenever someone wants to have an urgent meeting I schedule it for next week." I felt that with the 2024 deadline looming on the horizon every day matters.

Hope to talk to you in London in more detail -- outside working hours of course. X7 comes first.

Take care and see you soon!

--
Argo Tuulik
Writer
•••
--

Ed gets back to me with basically a non-answer. It's diplomatic but doesn't really say anything. Too boring to waste your time with it.

The only line worth paying attention to is this:

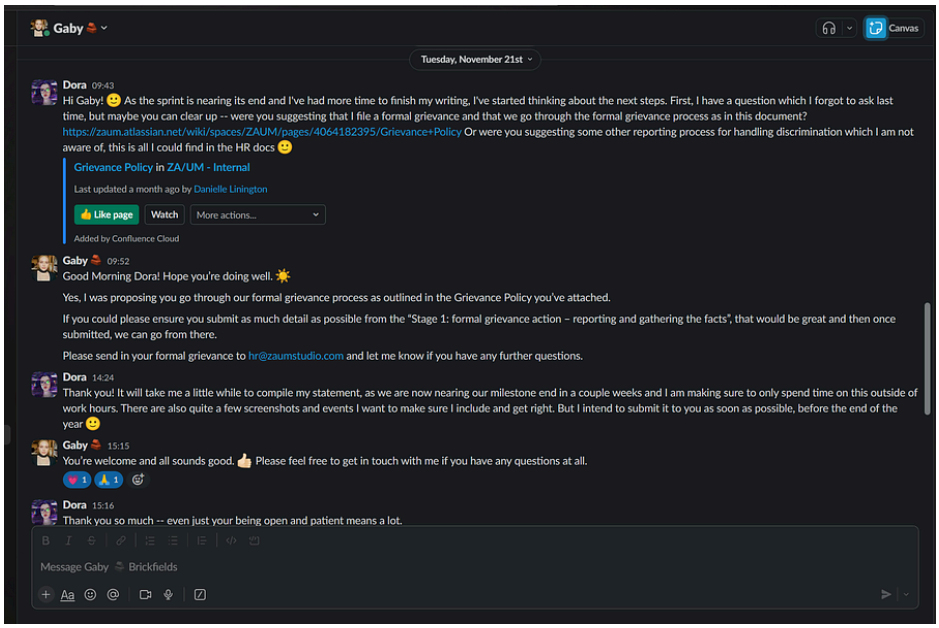
One big one is the group call that resulted in you alleging that Denis did something that was worse than anything you ever saw Robert do. While I was not there, I spoke to both of you afterwards and described my displeasure with what I heard. I am not going to argue over who was in the wrong more – as you'll see below, I am not happy about the Robert comparison - but was not pleased that neither of you reached out to each other to talk it out. Your continued comparison of Denis to Robert, who is one of the most toxic creatives that I have ever heard about in this industry, is counter to the Denis that I've worked with over the past 9 months. It was not Denis's finest moment, and he is going to reach out to you to finally hash this all out. He can also describe his role with the project – not creative director nor a creative role – and answer any questions there. Note: this is not Denis defending Denis, those are my (Ed's) words. From his role with Disco, you two can also discuss the differences in production methodologies. We obviously should be taking what was learned from that project and apply it going forward. I would also like nothing more than to continue to push forward the standard in our sub-genre.

This is insane-man behavior. You have never met Robert and you dare to call him 'one of the most toxic creatives in the industry'? Did Tõnis eat your brain, Tomaszewski?

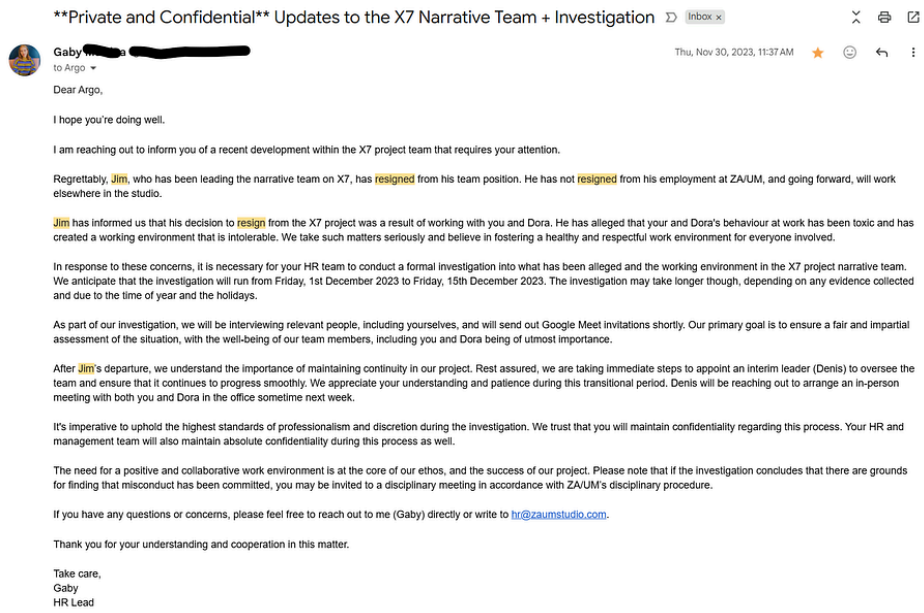
What Tõnis did to me, Jim, Phil and the entire X7 writing team on that fateful 19th of June afternoon is *way* worse than anything I ever saw Robert do. Robert could be impatient, borderline inconsiderate, sometimes a little rude, but I never saw him being malicious. And Tõnis acted with deliberate malice. Do you need to hear the audio?

So the management rejects my proposal to downsize X7 to an agile spike team. Work continues, people burn, deadline approaches.

For clarity I'm trying to focus on my own story more than anything but in the background another storm has been brewing. Dora will describe her struggles herself—and they are way worse than mine—but the short of it is she informs HR that she's going to submit a formal complaint for all the harassment, bullying and discrimination Tõnis and his direct subordinates have put her through during her 2 years in the studio. She was doing the work of a co-director on X7 in the beginning, and in winter 2023 Tõnis essentially reduced her role to a junior writer in terms of responsibilities.


Gaby
Canvas
Tuesday, November 21st
Dora 09:43
Hi Gaby! As the sprint is nearing its end and I've had more time to finish my writing, I've started thinking about the next steps. First, I have a question which I forgot to ask last time, but maybe you can clear up -- were you suggesting that I file a formal grievance and that we go through the formal grievance process as in this document? https://zaum.atlassian.net/wiki/spaces/ZAUM/pages/4064182395/Grievance+Policy Or were you suggesting some other reporting process for handling discrimination which I am not aware of, this is all I could find in the HR docs
Grievance Policy in ZA/UM - Internal
Last updated a month ago by Danielle Linington
Like page
Watch
More actions...
Added by Confluence Cloud
Gaby 09:52
Good Morning Dora! Hope you're doing well.
Yes, I was proposing you go through our formal grievance process as outlined in the Grievance Policy you've attached.
If you could please ensure you submit as much detail as possible from the "Stage 1: formal grievance action – reporting and gathering the facts", that would be great and then once submitted, we can go from there.
Please send in your formal grievance to hr@zaumstudio.com and let me know if you have any further questions.
Dora 14:24
Thank you! It will take me a little while to compile my statement, as we are now nearing our milestone end in a couple weeks and I am making sure to only spend time on this outside of work hours. There are also quite a few screenshots and events I want to make sure I include and get right. But I intend to submit it to you as soon as possible, before the end of the year
Gaby 15:15
You're welcome and all sounds good. Please feel free to get in touch with me if you have any questions at all.
Dora 15:16
Thank you so much -- even just your being open and patient means a lot.
Message Gaby Brickfields

Two days before the day she had promised to file the grievance, Dora and I get a message from HR that a formal grievance has instead been launched against *us* by our now former team-lead Jim on the grounds of creating a toxic workplace.


Private and Confidential Updates to the X7 Narrative Team + Investigation
Inbox
Gaby [redacted]
to Argo
Thu, Nov 30, 2023, 11:37 AM
Dear Argo,
I hope you're doing well.
I am reaching out to inform you of a recent development within the X7 project team that requires your attention.
Regrettably, Jim, who has been leading the narrative team on X7, has resigned from his team position. He has not resigned from his employment at ZA/UM, and going forward, will work elsewhere in the studio.
Jim has informed us that his decision to resign from the X7 project was a result of working with you and Dora. He has alleged that your and Dora's behaviour at work has been toxic and has created a working environment that is intolerable. We take such matters seriously and believe in fostering a healthy and respectful work environment for everyone involved.
In response to these concerns, it is necessary for your HR team to conduct a formal investigation into what has been alleged and the working environment in the X7 project narrative team. We anticipate that the investigation will run from Friday, 1st December 2023 to Friday, 15th December 2023. The investigation may take longer though, depending on any evidence collected and due to the time of year and the holidays.
As part of our investigation, we will be interviewing relevant people, including yourselves, and will send out Google Meet invitations shortly. Our primary goal is to ensure a fair and impartial assessment of the situation, with the well-being of our team members, including you and Dora being of utmost importance.
After Jim's departure, we understand the importance of maintaining continuity in our project. Rest assured, we are taking immediate steps to appoint an interim leader (Denis) to oversee the team and ensure that it continues to progress smoothly. We appreciate your understanding and patience during this transitional period. Denis will be reaching out to arrange an in-person meeting with both you and Dora in the office sometime next week.
It's imperative to uphold the highest standards of professionalism and discretion during the investigation. We trust that you will maintain confidentiality regarding this process. Your HR and management team will also maintain absolute confidentiality during this process as well.
The need for a positive and collaborative work environment is at the core of our ethos, and the success of our project. Please note that if the investigation concludes that there are grounds for finding that misconduct has been committed, you may be invited to a disciplinary meeting in accordance with ZA/UM's disciplinary procedure.
If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me (Gaby) directly or write to hr@zaumstudio.com.
Thank you for your understanding and cooperation in this matter.
Take care,
Gaby
HR Lead

This comes as a complete shock. Never mind that Jim and I have been friends for a long time and always gotten along great, never mind that even during the last difficult months we've always tried to figure the situations out together, never mind that a harsh word has not been said between us… BUT our entire communication exists and is easily reviewable via slack messages and audio recordings.

On Sun, 3 Dec 2023 at 22:57, Argo Tuulik <argo@zaumstudio.com> wrote:

Hi Gaby!

Hope you had a good weekend!

I'm so sorry to hear about Jim's departure. This is an awful situation and I sincerely hope the company can offer him support in these difficult times.
I feel terrible knowing that Jim feels I played a role in making the workplace environment intolerable for him.
To say it comes as a shock to me would be an understatement. I've known Jim for a very long time and worked closely with him during the VO recording and QA of the Final Cut of Disco Elysium as well as in the recent months on X7. To my knowledge our relationship has always been cordial and warm and I'm horrified learning that Jim feels the opposite.
Since learning of the investigation I've gone over my notes that I take after every meeting as well as Slack conversation that both Jim and I have been part of and at the moment I am honestly puzzled trying to think what could have lead Jim to feel our working relationship was toxic. Nonetheless I intend to fully cooperate with the investigation, answer any questions that may arise and provide any documentation that may be required. Being autistic I am aware that I sometimes misread situations but I am going to help you to the best of my abilities to get to the bottom of this situation.

I know your investigation is going to be fair and impartial and I hope you will interview everyone who works side-by-side with myself and Jim on a daily basis and could provide insight on these claims. People like [redacted], Chris Priestman, [redacted] and [redacted] -- to name but a few -- have definitely had a chance to observe our relationship develop as we rush to get the 2-Hour-Playable across the finish line, and could provide valuable impartial insight in my opinion.

I would like to ask if we could reschedule my interview to next week though? I talked with my union representative and he is not available in the coming week but as the investigation is set to take place from 1st December 2023 to Friday, 15th December 2023 I would be grateful if we could perhaps do it on the afternoon of either Wednesday the 13th of December or Thursday the 14th of December. Anywhere between 12:00 to 16:00 would work. I'll lock it down with the union as soon as you can confirm if it works for you. :)

And yes, I agree that discretion is absolutely essential in situations like this, My lips are sealed and I have made no attempt to contact Jim or share any of this with any of my colleagues and will continue to do so.

I hope you can send my love to Jim and support him throughout this. I've considered him a good friend for many years and this investigation does not change that no matter the outcome.

Please let me know about the rescheduling and have a good week!

Cheers!

Argo

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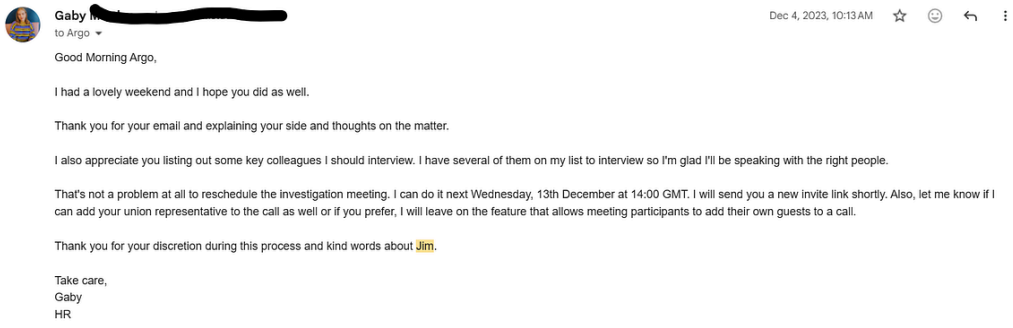
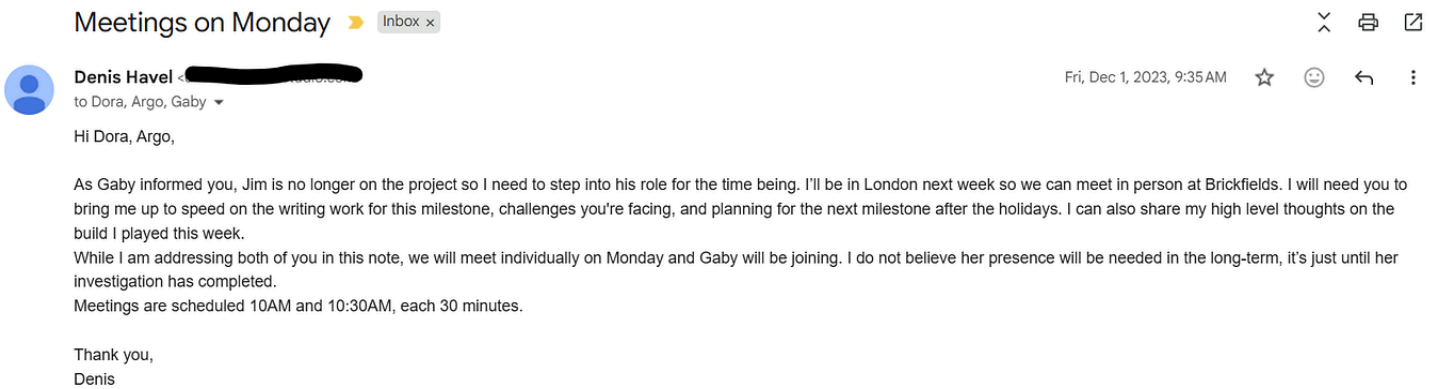

Gaby [redacted]
to Argo
Dec 4, 2023, 10:13 AM
Good Morning Argo,
I had a lovely weekend and I hope you did as well.
Thank you for your email and explaining your side and thoughts on the matter.
I also appreciate you listing out some key colleagues I should interview. I have several of them on my list to interview so I'm glad I'll be speaking with the right people.
That's not a problem at all to reschedule the investigation meeting. I can do it next Wednesday, 13th December at 14:00 GMT. I will send you a new invite link shortly. Also, let me know if I can add your union representative to the call as well or if you prefer, I will leave on the feature that allows meeting participants to add their own guests to a call.
Thank you for your discretion during this process and kind words about Jim.
Take care,
Gaby
HR

On top of that little shocker I get an email from Tõnis:


Meetings on Monday
Inbox ×
Denis Havel <[redacted]>
to Dora, Argo, Gaby
Fri, Dec 1, 2023, 9:35 AM
Hi Dora, Argo,
As Gaby informed you, Jim is no longer on the project so I need to step into his role for the time being. I'll be in London next week so we can meet in person at Brickfields. I will need you to bring me up to speed on the writing work for this milestone, challenges you're facing, and planning for the next milestone after the holidays. I can also share my high level thoughts on the build I played this week.
While I am addressing both of you in this note, we will meet individually on Monday and Gaby will be joining. I do not believe her presence will be needed in the long-term, it's just until her investigation has completed.
Meetings are scheduled 10AM and 10:30AM, each 30 minutes.
Thank you,
Denis

And if I know one thing I know I like my Tõnis angry so I reply with…

On Sun, Dec 3, 2023 at 11:12 PM Argo Tuulik <argo@zaumstudio.com> wrote:

> Hi Gaby and Tõnis!
>
> Hope you're doing good!
>
> I was deeply saddened to hear about Jim. Truly horrible news. :(
>
> It is clear that the project needs an interim replacement for the time being but I would like to ask you to reconsider appointing Tõnis to that role on the grounds that I have previously raised complaints of toxic workplace behavior against Tõnis -- both to HR and to our president Ed Tomaszewski -- and Tõnis's (and Lead Producer Phil Davidson's) actions on the Narrative Team Structure call on 19.06.23 are literally the only source of tension I can think of between myself and Jim. I now fear retaliation from Tõnis for reporting this if I'm placed directly under his leadership.
>
> In addition, Tõnis's statements like "If I had more time I could write the whole thing myself" -- relayed to me by our former produce[redacted] -- and "If I had three months of free time I would become a better artist than anyone in this studio." -- said in a recent leads meeting -- lead me to question if he fully comprehends the magnitude of challenges the Narrative Team is facing.
>
> If I may make a suggestion I think our Operations Manager [redacted] would be a more suitable candidate for an interim Writing Team lead role. I'm suggesting [redacted] instead because he has:
>
> * Extensive experience with narrative systems (having developed a tabletop setting of his own as well as running D&D campaigns for at least a decade).
> * Vast knowledge of various RPG games and systems (both as a player and an active member of the RPGCodex forums).
> * Fluency in the English language.
> * Intimate hands-on knowledge and access to tech-side of the[redacted] -- something that's really been a major source of concerns/blockers for the writing team in the past months.
>
> I'll be there in the office at 10 Monday morning so we can discuss these and many other things Tõnis listed in person. Looking forward to hearing your thoughts on the build, Tõnis! :)
>
> I would like to ask if you could maybe extend the meeting from 30 minutes to an hour? If I'm honest then looking at the topics we need to cover I think we need at least two, but I understand everyone's schedules are busy and we need to compress things to smaller bits.
>
> Looking forward to seeing both of you in the office tomorrow and have a great upcoming week!
>
> Cheers,
>
> Argo
> •••

Unfortunately my trade union representative is unable to join me in such short notice so I go to the London office alone on Monday morning.

This is how I describe it to my trade union representative afterwards:

Argo Tuulik <[redacted]> Tue, Dec 5, 2023 at 3:16 PM
To: WGGB Casework [redacted]

Hi[redacted]!

Wanted to give you a little update on how things are progressing.

Like I said I managed to reschedule the hearing to 13th of December, 14:00 and HR should have sent you the invite, so all good on that end.

I also had a face-to-face meeting with the Executive Production Officer Tõnis haavel on Monday morning at 10. Also present at the meeting was our HR lead Gabriella[redacted]who's also the lead investigator on the toxic behavior allegations against me and will be conducting the interview on the 13th of December.

On the day before the meeting, in my response (will attach the whole email chain to the letter), I highlighted some concerns I have about Tõnis's appointment to the role and -- as the Principal Writer on the project I offered my opinion on who I see as a more suitable candidate for the time being. Well, you can probably imagine it pissed Tõnis off to no end and the vibe of the whole meeting was pretty hostile. I was happy about that honestly because unless he's angry Tõnis rarely ever shows the aggressive erratic side of himself that came out on this the meeting, and I was very happy Gaby had a chance to witness it.

I don't remember every detail of the meeting because the stress-levels were super high but roughly it went something like this...

(And honestly feel free to just skim over it -- not sure how much of it is really important. I just tried to put down as many details as I could recall.)

* Denis started by saying that is offended that I sent him an email that "basically says i'm shit" (his English really isn't that good). I asked him to elaborate what made him feel like this. He said it was the quotes of his, and he had never said them. Source of one of the quotes I already mentioned in the email. The other one I offered to share with Gaby in private (which I did today.).

* He then said something along the lines that everybody who works with me says I'm toxic, "Justin says it, Chris says it, Jim says it..." -- I didn't contest the statement on that meeting, but asked for further clarification on bringing Justin into it in my follow-up email. I also said that I will not discuss anything related to Jim or investigation without my Union representative present at which point Gaby interfered and said it is perfectly alright this meeting isn't about that.

* I think then we moved on to the writing team challenges -- that was the only topic we managed to address in any length (from the list of topics Tõnis provided in his invite letter).
I started by expressing my concern that in order to talk about the problems with writing quality I need to talk about the individual writers and their skill sets and that the last time I did so (to the Lead Producer Phil Davidson) this information was leaked to at least one person who's suitability for the project I had questioned -- that's Jim Ashilevi. Didn't get a clear response to my concern and instead Tõnis went on to what in my opinion was an incoherent ramble about collaboration, trust, team -- he concluded it with "Yes, only you know how to do anything and everyone else is shit, right?" - I asked for clarification but got more rambling instead.

* Honestly it's hard to truly assess how well it all went. In my own opinion I think I came off calm and collected and Tõnis hostile, incoherent and honestly -- incompetent. He kept coming back to the importance of people's feelings and at one point asked "Tell me how I'm feeling.". I told him I'm autistic and reading feelings is a bit difficult for me. He didn't address that and moved on. It was honestly very hard to follow his train of thought -- something many people in the studio have expressed at different times.

* Then we talked about burnout. I said myself and lots of people in my team are experiencing burnout. We stayed on the topic for about 20 minutes I think. He kept asking me if I can work eight hours a day (later changed it to seven to include the lunch break) and am I burnt out. I said yes to both. He came back to these questions at least 5 more times. He -- or might have been Gaby -- asked about the reasons for burnout and I told them first that it is not actually the working hours that are the primary reason for burnout and there are lot of times where people work 12 hours a day on something and don't experience burnout because of lack of additional factors. I said -- paraphrasing an article I had read -- that a bigger reason for burnout is "inability to do your job well". Tõnis seemed to take this personally, got very defensive and said he doesn't believe me and disagrees. I promised to send them my source (which I did last night). Tõnis also said that if I'm so burnt out I shouldn't be writing these long letters in the evening (referring to my initial reply to himself and Gaby as I understood).

* I talked about how the whole team (writing and other disciplines) is experiencing burnout and people have been crying on Retrospectives. I also mentioned that burnout has been brought up in Retrospectives for months now and suggested consulting the previous Retrospective Miro-boards for confirmation. Tõnis said that the company has issued an anti-crunch policy and no one should work more than 8 hours a day and this is a problem for the leads to solve. I pointed out that issuing a company-wide anti-crunch policy after people complain about crunch in Retros when they are already burnt out, and we're in heavy crunch-mode trying to finish a crucial milestone (that will likely determine the future of the entire project) doesn't come off as very constructive or helpful and feels more like it's not crunching that's now against the company policy but talking about it. Tõnis went into another one of his "so everyone is shit, company policy is shit and only you know how to do anything?" tirades. I reiterated that I don't think there's anything wrong with the policy and it's absolutely necessary, but dropping it on an already burnt out team without any contextualisation or comment (and a week after people complained about crunch on retro) sends a different message than probably intended.

probably intended.

* I might be skipping something -- probably am -- but at some point we finally got to talking about my concerns about the writing quality. I explained that despite the (completely unrealistic -- I didn't say it out loud) expectations that people with very little or no experience in working with the type of game (and writing) can pick it up in a matter of months and full-speed production can resume, it hasn't happened. I praised one of the writers for their literary style and added she will absolutely be able to create fantastic work in time. But because she has no previous experience in working on games nor even playing them, it's gonna take her time to internalize the structures and methodology. With the other two -- without naming names -- I said that I feel they reached a certain level of structural understanding months ago but what's now holding them back is understanding the writing style and despite me having spent most of the last quarter tutoring them the pace of their progress has halted and the writing going into the Vertical Slice (that's the goal of the current Milestone) is not up to the qualitative standards of ZA/UM.

* Taking into account my tense relationship with Tõnis I further explained that when an Art Director points to a stick figure and says "this is not good enough." then everyone can clearly see it. With writing it is more complicated and because I understand that, I proposed to enlist the help of the Writers Team of the other project in the studio -- codenamed C4. More precisely Justin Keenan and the four writers working under him. I proposed to ask their opinion on the quality of the current writing. Tõnis replied by talking about collaboration and team and the importance of trusting leads. At some point he asked me what is collaboration? I offered my opinion that it's when people work together on something. He neither confirmed nor denied but talked about respect and trust -- I'd say about 70% of what Tõnis said in that meeting is truisms no one would argue against.

* At some point I had said something, Tõnis had gone one about something adjacent to what I said and when he fell silent neither of us was willing to break eye-contact. Honestly it was super weird because I think this tense staredown lasted about a minute -- maybe more. I hoped Gaby would stop it but eventually it was Tõnis who turned away and started talking about something else. I know it's stupid of me to be happy about this but still -- [redacted] and I felt something change in our dynamic (for the worse no doubt) in that moment.

* We kept coming back to burnout and he insisted I make some kind of a list of my tasks and (presumably) he would then help me to prioritize these tasks so I don't exceed 7 hours of work a day. The list concept was so vague I had to ask three times what exactly he means and wants me to do. Eventually I asked Gaby if she could tell me what Tõnis wanted me to do and she hadn't understood either. I think that's where we ran out of time as well. The whole meeting lasted about an hour and 20 minutes by my estimate (instead of the planned 30 minutes).

* After the meeting Gaby asked if we can talk privately about burnout. We spent 10 minutes discussing it and I told her the best thing to do in my opinion is to reassure the people who are already burnt-out and crunching that no one is going to discipline them for that and that the company is aware of the problem and is actively working on a solution -- help is coming. Gaby also apologized to me that it had gotten so tense with Tõnis, asked me if I was okay and said I can always come to her. HR is there to help. Throughout the meeting -- as well as on the quick follow-up -- I felt very happy Gaby has been appointed the new HR lead. She really does seem impartial. Or if anything felt a bit more empathetic towards me. Might be misreading corporate politeness as actual empathy here, but that's the vibe I got :)

Anyways, that's a summary of the meeting. You can see the follow-up both Tõnis and myself sent in the evening.

Today Jim's departure and Tõnis' role as an interim lead was made known to everyone on the project.

I think that's all I got right now :)

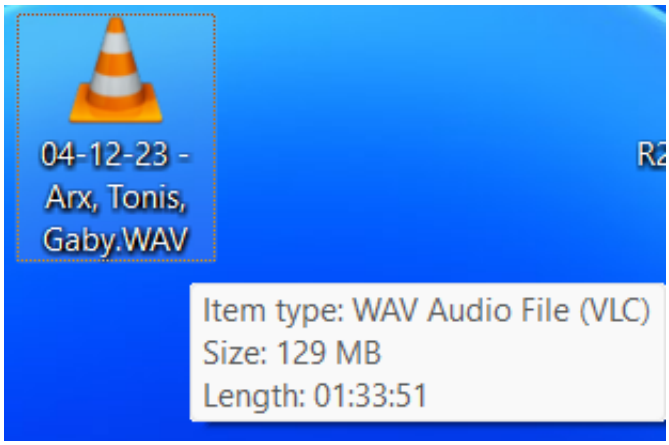
If you have any thoughts-suggestions please let me know.

Thank you for your support and advice!

Cheers!

Argo

Breaking News: "Local man thinks WWE Wrestling is real and HR department impartial."



Afterwards Tõnis and I exchange more emails…

Denis Havel [redacted]
to Argo, Gaby

Dec 4, 2023, 9:11 PM

Hi Argo,

In person today we spoke about some of the accusations you made over email, I will now reply so it is on the record.
It is unclear to me on what I would be retaliating against you for. On September 4, you formally requested - in writing - that I be your lead. We then met in person on September 22, to discuss the incident over the summer, both apologised for each of our actions, and I felt like we put this matter behind us.
"If I had more time I could write the whole thing myself." I have never thought this and I never said it. I wonder why [redacted], would say such a thing?
"If I had three months of free time I would become a better artist than anyone in this studio." Again, I have never said this and Gaby can confirm this with the X7 leads. Also, it is the opposite of how I think about the contribution and value of our amazing team of artists.
Recommending [redacted] for this role is confusing and inappropriate at this time. We cannot put anyone else as your manager while you are being investigated for allegedly causing your prior manager to resign. I am stepping in because of that, not because I believe I am a better writer, editor, team lead, or english speaker. I am none of those things.

Please focus on getting your task list together so we can make sure you are only working 7 hours a day.

Denis

The 'formal request' he's referring to is my rejected X7 Spike team proposal. And yes, two separate women testified that Tõnis had indeed made claims of being able to 'write the whole thing himself' (if not for the time constraints) and "become a better artist than anyone in the studio in three months".

I reply to Tõnis… (as I already showed you earlier):

On Tue, Dec 5, 2023 at 12:10 AM Argo Tuulik <argo@zaumstudio.com> wrote:

Hey Gaby and Tõnis!

Thank you for clarifying things for me Tõnis!

If you're interested in following up on the "Three months of free time..." line, Gabby, I'd be happy to have a call with you :)

There were a couple of things from our Monday morning conversation I also wanted to follow-up on :)

First we spoke about burnout and I said it is not actually the working hours that are the main factor in causing burnout. Tõnis said he doesn' believe me and I promised to send you a link to illustrate my point.

This link in Harvard Business Review was incredibly illuminating to me in understanding our own situation. It lists top 5 reasons for burnout as:

1. Unfair treatment at work
2. Unmanageable workload
3. Lack of role clarity
4. Lack of communication and support from their manager
5.Unreasonable time pressure

https://hbr.org/2019/12/burnout-is-about-your-workplace-not-your-people

In my research into burnout I collected more materials which I can share with you if you wish :)

Hope we can have a wider conversation on the topic.

Then in the earlier part of our conversation this morning Tõnis mentioned Justin and how my relationship with him was allegedly toxic. I was so surprised I didn't even think to address this at the moment. That's because up until disagreeing with the creative direction of the initial Cascade pitch (which has since gone through two reboots and is now incorporating most of the changes Dora and I suggested) Justin and I had had a simply wonderful and a very fruitful collaboration. I dare to say we loved working with each other and my chaotic writing style had a beautiful synergy with his technical skills. I am incredibly proud of the work we did on fleshing out the critical path for Y12. Also, when Justin was offered the role of the lead writer on the team he came to me asking if I would feel okay with it. Having already suggested that Justin should take over that role to producers I told him that there's no better person for the job and I couldn't be happier with this course of events. What followed was more than six months (I would have to check my notes for the exact timeline) of wonderful partnership. I think I've said it to you, Tõnis, and I definitely wrote it in an email to Ed -- Justin Keenan is the best lead I've ever had. The last parting words we said to each other in New York were "I love you man" and "we'll work together again some day".

Furthermore, when you visited myself and Dora in our house in Brighton and we finally talked about how the events transpired on C4 and the enormous pressure under which we put together the X7 concept, you said: "You guys are so incredibly strong. I'm so sorry you had to go through this." You also apologized -- on behalf of the company I presumed. I remember this so clearly because after everything that had happened this was the first time I felt heard and understood.
I'm sure you can understand how now hearing you say that you think my relationship with Justin was toxic really does come out of the blue. Could you elaborate on that please?

We ran out of time in our meeting and barely scratched the surface of the topics we meant to cover. Didn't go deeper into the writing team challenges, the [redacted] issues, Milestone planning and you didn't even get a chance to express your thoughts on the build, Tõnis.
I've also been waiting for Jim's return to talk about unused vacation days and when would be the least disruptive time to take them. I think I have 11 unused days and as I understand, only 5 will carry over to the next calendar year? This is a conversation I should now be having with you, as the interim writing team lead, right, Tõnis?

So I think we should schedule a follow-up meeting to cover all these topics? :)

Oh yes, two more things... I apologize, but I was left a bit unclear on two matters.

First, where did we land on asking Justin and his team for their opinion on the writing quality? I think it could really help us see things more clearly. :)

And could you please give me instructions on what exactly is that list of tasks you want me to compile, Tõnis? Is it just my current open tasks? The tasks I see someone in the team needs to undertake on the writing side? Or something else? Also how would you like me to break them down? Asking to understand how granular I should get. :)
Polishing the build is still my priority for tomorrow (unless you want me to shift gears and focus on the list?) but I can get started on that list first thing Wednesday morning if you point me in the right direction :)

Have a wonderful day, both of you!

Argo

Tõnis replies:

Denis Havel[redacted]
to Argo, Gaby

Dec 6, 2023, 1:08 PM

Hi Argo,

Thank you for your thoughts and questions.
I tried to scan your letter for questions I need to answer and claims I need to address.
You mentioned in our talk that you have autistic spectrum, I happily explain things that remained unclear.

1. For the accusation about "me being an artist"- I assure you that this is opposite of what I think, believe and preach. If someone misunderstood or something got lost in information transfer getting this info to you, it is my problem and I have to straighten that with the team.
2. I never said I do not believe you. What I said about the crunch is that there are a lot of written materials about that. Thank you for pointing out the one you see as your north star. My belief is that crunch is always the result of too long hours and mismanaging of time.
3. I am glad that you now feel good about Justin and love him. Just for the record, I said only that Jim is the third lead you are parting ways, after Justin and Chris. I hope the investigation will bring light to your relationships at the time and we can put that behind us.
4. About your task list. You said that you have a huge task list (or backlog), as I understood much bigger that your manager or production has knowledge of. To be able to understand and help you manage this I need to get access to that (whatever you have in written form, although usually managers have backlogs till the end of project)
5. About your unused vacation days, try to get me the needed information about your tasks this week and we can go over everything the rest of the week and into early next week if needed. I'm happy for you to take your annual leave starting Friday, 15th December and going until Friday, 22nd December. As we have company Christmas days planned after that, we will meet next year. This way, you can use 6 of your 11 unused days and still have 5 days to roll over into 2024. For clarity - although we have a policy that says that planned vacations should be confirmed well ahead (to keep team members' tasks lists and blockers under control), I will wave this in the light that your manager has sick leave for some time.
6. Justin as well as [redacted] and other people have their own tasks. To start to negotiate Justin's time we first have to get clear the backlog of the project. So this will be several steps along the way.

I am also glad that we got the retaliation misunderstanding out of the system. Sometimes small reminders do clarify our minds.

Regards,
Denis

Tõnis and I don't have much more contact after that. I think I see him on one more X7 writer's call where he's the acting Narrative Lead. It's uneventful. Next time after that is my redundancy meeting after X7 is already cancelled.

Meanwhile the investigation into my own allegedly toxic behavior takes place. **PMG mistakenly described it as an external investigation. In reality it was an internal investigation conducted by Zaum HR department, specifically the newly appointed HR Lead, Gaby.** She interviews me with my union rep present. He (the rep) later describes the interview as a fishing operation. Here's the protocol of the interview HR sent me and my union rep after the interview…

Argo Tuulik:

[redacted]: I have some questions regarding the scope of the investigation - it's not very clear at this point what allegations have been made, so maybe we can start there.

Gaby: What made me launch this investigation is that Jim, our Narrative Lead on X7, same as Argo, and he stepped down due to alleged toxic behaviour from Argo and Dora. This is very distressing to hear, and made me launch an investigation to get further information on what is and isn't going on.

[redacted]: I'm wondering if there are any specific examples that have been cited that we can dig deeper into. It's hard to answer questions without specifics.

Gaby: I have a few questions relating to that during my actual questioning - toxic behaviour can mean so many different things to so many different people, which is why I wanted to interview Argo, to get his side of it.

[redacted]: I just wanted to clarify there are specifics.

1. **Can you please give us a brief description of your time on the X7 project and within your role as a Principal Writer?**

   It's been a pretty tumultuous project from the very beginning. Everyone has been waiting until we settle down into the 'storming norming' phase. Stability has not been very good. We went from asking new writers in January this year to finally absorbing P1 team after the Porto event in June, and then we went into this tutoring/onboarding phase that was supposed to last a couple of months max, but was dragged out to 4 months. I don't remember the exact date of the July content block, but that also added a lot of pressure realising how much we had done, how much time was left, and how much left we had to do. It's been a rocky project. Following up Disco Elysium, which is already a tall task, in this climate, where people are hoping for us to fail, is really hard.

2. **It's been communicated to me that you've allegedly said in a previous dialogue pipeline review meeting that Jim being Dora's boss is a "bad look". Firstly, I'd like to ask whether this is even true and if so, are you able to provide any further context into what you meant by this?**

   Yeah, I think you're referring to the meeting on the 13th October - it was when [redacted] introduced to us this editing/writing review pyramid structure, and during this conversation, Dora pointed out that none of the responsibilities we agreed with Ed, Denis and Phil/Jim/Chris, were left on the pyramid - it also turned out Tom had not even seen the document. To put it simply, basically Dora's role had gone from being a co-director of the project to now being demoted to merely a writer. I also think it was me that pointed out in that meeting that when you look at this pyramid of three men, myself, Chris, and Jim on the top, and then all the women are on the lowest rank, this is a bad look.

   [redacted]: So just to qualify - you meant from an optics and quality point of view, it was not good PR for the company, to have purely men in charge and women in a more subordinate role?

Argo: Yes - I meant the optics were not good. Also, considering me and Dora started this project, I'd be lying if I said her input has been any less than 50%, probably more, so to suddenly be demoted into this role seemed really undeserved. Also during these structure calls, when we were still talking about roles, I had suggested Dora as the Lead Writer. Hopefully that answers your question.

Just to also add, Jim and I had a follow up call after that, which was meant to be about one of the writers and what to do with the work quality, and Jim also asked me to clarify on the same topic, and we talked through the entire journey of how X7 came to be - starting from C4,, to C4, to Dora leaving her career in science to come work on a sequel to a masterpiece, and then the whole C4 thing happened, and Jim said it must have been an emotional rollercoaster for us during that.

[redacted] to clarify - your comments in relation to restructuring - you weren't in any way trying to undermine Jim's role - it was purely PR and optics for the company?

Argo: yeah absolutely. We agreed with his role as narrative team lead in the structure talks. Seemed like a good solution for everyone.

Gaby: Can you speak about allegedly not willing to give feedback/mentor/tutor [redacted]?

I can shed some light. Immediately after the writers turned in their test work, when we got back from vacation, we went over the results, and I had a follow up call with Jim where we talked through what the works were, and the plan from there on was to have these group editing sessions where all the writers are represent, and everyone can see how we edit and how we work.

Before the very first call, I contacted Jim and wrote to him, had a 1:1 call and said I'm struggling to do the feedback thing, as I don't want to put people in a position where I only have praise for [redacted], a bit of criticism for Chris, and nothing good to say for [redacted] dialogues. We talked extensively about this and the problems in [redacted] dialogues, trying to figure out how we best use [redacted] and what's the best role for [redacted], and I think it was before the writer's gathering in September, we agreed we would use [redacted] on non-writing writing activities. Jim agreed with me on that point then.

A few weeks later, he came back and said he wanted [redacted] to still be writing dialogues - adding a massive dialogue that needs review adds days of editing. Eventually I agreed with Jim's solution where Chris will give the first line of feedback editing, and then it comes back to me. One of the same dialogues Jim put [redacted] to work on, we did this round of editing with Chris, who took this feedback back to [redacted], and overall this feedback issue, which I've spoken to [redacted] about, there is a feedback issue - of the 3 new writers, 2 of them are still in a place where I don't feel comfortable criticising them in front of everybody. Recent dialogues that they have made are basically a re-write. What I usually do is take old dialogue aside, taking out bits that are usable, but in [redacted] case, there were no usable bits. I also want to say that at the same time when speaking to Jim about it, I explained to him that this is not a universal quality problem, but a problem in nailing the particular Disco style. [redacted] has previous experience writing on more [redacted] which is a completely different style to writing from Disco. The writing we do is not something you can teach overnight. I also told Jim that with enough time anything is possible, but we need to, in this case, have more face to face work so that we can sync up. The last point in this chain is that [redacted] made 2 dialogues, and I wanted to have a meeting with Jim and [redacted] for the last 3 weeks to talk about them, but I didn't know

about Jim resigning/going to resign at this point, so eventually I just had the meeting with [redacted]

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[redacted]: Just for clarity, what I'm hearing is that there were issues around the workflow and the amount of time it would have taken for Argo to have these reviews with [redacted], so matter of time and resources/workflow hindered the ability to mentor/coach. Does that sound fair?

Argo: Yes - that's what I tried to explain to Jim in these two meetings specifically about [redacted], that in order to do the kind of feedback he proposed, I need to take this dialogue to pieces, mentally internalise it, figure out a way to do it different and I gave him an estimate that it would be about 2 days of internalising, writing up notes, at a minimum. In this workflow, Jim insisted it goes through Chris. First to Chris, then to [redacted], then Chris, then back to me and we review it together.

[redacted]: So it was a capacity question, not a 'do it or not' question.

Argo: yes absolutely. I never said that I would not do it, I just explained to him the time constraints and he promised he'd think about it.

Gaby: I appreciate the clarification. All I heard was one side and not your side. All I heard is that you just refused to give [redacted] any feedback, I didn't know you had also spoken to Jim about it previously to sort something out.

I've had several people come to me with this - people seem to have this thought that you have a general lack of trust with other colleagues on the X7 project and you're unwilling to delegate, as I know you have a lot on your plate and I understand that you have a call with Denis tomorrow regarding your workload, but what are your thoughts on these allegations?

Argo: Could you be more specific?

Gaby: It's quite broad, it's a more general lack of trust - allegedly not wanting to give certain work to fellow writers, wanting to do all the work because maybe you don't trust them.

[redacted]: We would need more specific examples to give an answer on that.

Gaby: Jim has alleged you accused him of making decisions behind his back, after finding out he decided to keep [redacted] on the project, despite your wishes for [redacted] to no longer contribute to X7. Can you speak to this?

Argo: After the first call we had regarding [redacted] we ended on 'okay let's keep talking and have a follow up call'. Some days later, 4-5 days later, during a scrum, I heard from [redacted] that [redacted] is writing dialogue, so I wrote to Jim for clarification, as during the previous call Jim repeatedly emphasised that the [redacted] situation is a delicate situation and we need to work together to find a solution and figure it out. So I was very surprised a solution was found without me. Jim then told me when I asked about it that he was trying to protect my time, as we ([redacted], Dora, myself) were working on syncing writing and animation for [redacted], and Jim said he didn't want to interfere with that.

[redacted]: Would you say there was maybe a communications breakdown?

Argo: Yeah - why I felt it was that me and Jim have always been friends before we joined the project, and communication has been very immediate, and we've never had sudden moments where we don't communicate.

Gaby: Those were the main allegations. A big part of it is that people in senior positions feel you don't like or respect them as they've been put on top of you and Dora, but this has helped me understand your mind. I'd be curious to hear your thoughts on how the restructuring talks went, and if you found anything particularly worrying during them.

Argo: I can give a quick overview. The process was very rocky, starting out that I think it was supposed to be settled in 1-2 meetings. Eventually it was 8, and span over 2.5 months. There was some really bad stuff happening in the middle of this - I spoke to [redacted] and Ed about this. In 6 of these structure talks, as Denis later explained, in order to 'teach me a lesson' in hypocrisy, told Phil, Lead Producer, 'why don't you tell everyone what Argo said' and what he was referring to was during a discussion much earlier, way before Porto, in May or something like that, when myself Chris and Phil and Dora had a longer call, around 45 minutes or so, where Phil told us the P1 writers were joining. This was the first I heard of this - I was very surprised that it was not a discussion, but a decision. During this call I outlined many other problems - the concern about the short timeline, at that time VO recording was meant to start in March, and I was also worried about the additional tissue that brings the main story together, and that we didn't have time for that. Eventually, Phil said 'this is the situation. either accept it or the project will be cancelled', and my response was 'I'd rather it get cancelled than be a turd'. In the aforementioned meeting number 6, Phil turned this into 'if P1 writers join the project, it will be a turd'. We had a longer discussion over it, Denis messaged me immediately afterwards, asking to meet face to face, so I offered to come to the office, but he said he would rather have a walk in a park outside work hours which I was not comfortable with - I talked to Ed and later talked to [redacted], eventually Denis apologised for that, but I think Phil has not directly spoken to me ever since. Also, at the end of that call, I felt Denis was trying to diffuse the situation, saying it was a serious breach of confidentiality, very damaging to the structure of the team we're trying to built - literally sowing contempt between people who are meant to work together. When we had the discussions about which writers we should hire and were talking about [redacted] and P1 writers, I gave a long list of reasons as to why I thought P1 writers are not a good fit for X7, but what we could do is switch with C4 writers who were all hired specifically for an Elysium project. Denis said I shouldn't worry and that he had already shared this with Jim, which made me very uncomfortable, because of how Phil had bent my words and misrepresented what I said, so I have no knowledge of how he represented the other information, such as my adequate reasons as to why P1 writers were not a fit, and thus what Jim heard. When we had these talks initially, about P1 writers and earlier with [redacted] on both occasions I specifically said 'I hate being in a situation where I feel I have to professionally criticise my friends and this is 100% confidential and should never reach any of them', so to find out this confidentiality had been broken was really disheartening.

[redacted]: In terms of the restructure itself, and the communication and the timelines originally explained to you, how far were they kept to?

Argo: There was no timeline - it was a little chaotic. We didn't really know when the next meeting was going to be. The final call in this sequence was very unexpected. It was literally two days before we went on vacation - I think the talks had been going for so long, that other teams had done at least two retros and repeatedly expressed a lot of anxiety about the restructuring and not understanding what's happening, so it

felt like Ed and Denis wanted to accelerate this process and get it done before our vacation, but as it came without any warning, just a message in the calendar, it felt very sudden. On the last meeting when we were already working on a work document and all leaving comments, there were many comments around responsibilities etc left open that we assumed we were going to be addressing in follow up meetings but those comments were never addressed. It was not handled very well and was a very stressful experience.

[redacted]: So would you say there were issues around clarity during that process?

Argo: Absolutely - some of these issues are due to the fact that in the type of game we are making, where narrative and writing are inseparable, it's hard to break these into two pieces. Attempts to do this creates a very confusing overlapping list. In the final stages of those three meetings, one of the main things we talked about was the confusion where none really understands what their role is, or what they are doing on the project.

Gaby: Were you and Dora consulted before P1 writers were added to X7?

Argo: No - I heard earlier that P1 was paused but only first heard about the writer's joining in the aforementioned meeting. I was never consulted, just told what was happening.

3. **How has this whole situation taken a toll on you, either mentally or physically or both?**

   Yes - I'm sure it has on my mental, physical health too I'm sure but it's hard to measure. Part of the reason why is this project-wide burnout and crunch has happened on this project, due to the confusion that was started there. The physical part is hard unless I get a doctor's examination. But mentally it has been exhausting. Not being able to do your best work is really demoralising. It hasn't been good.

4. **Are you able to provide any further evidence or documentation to support your claims?**

   I can send you my entire chat history with Jim on Slack.

5. **Do you know of any witnesses that you feel would be necessary for me to interview during this investigation?**

   DEFINITELY [redacted], and [redacted], as they have the closest point of view of mine and Jim's relationship. Also [redacted] Chris Priestman, of course the Art team ([redacted])

5. **Do you have any concerns or fears related to this investigation or any potential action that could be taken?**

   To me the whole thing came completely out of the blue - I always considered Jim a friend, and in the days leading up to this meeting, I've gone over my notes, mentally gone over all the meetings with him, and I can't think of anything I would describe in toxic. Even our last call in late October, Jim emphasised that we keep thinking about things together.

[redacted]: Has Jim or anyone else ever formally or informally raised issues with you about your conduct while working on this project?

Argo: No they haven't. That's another thing that surprises me both on a personal level, as his friend and professional as his subordinate, I just don't understand why he didn't feel comfortable talking to me about it.

[redacted]: Is there anything within your HR policies and procedures that say that Jim should have spoken with Argo regarding his conduct as his manager before coming straight to a complaint?

Gaby: Yes - but if he really felt like it was so bad he could just file a complaint and come straight to HR, which he chose to do.

[redacted]: But at no point has he raised anything informally? I'm trying to seek clarity as at what point could Jim have spoken to Argo sooner, regarding Argo's alleged behaviour? Going from a friendship to a HR complaint - there seems to be quite a step there, so I want to ascertain clarity around if there were any prior problems Argo was aware of.

Argo: Like I said, I'll provide my Slack conversations so you can see them yourselves. The last call in October we had, we were still very much friends, and still very cordial. Never has he come to speak to me about these concerns.

7. **Is there anything else you would like to share that you feel would be relevant to this investigation?**

   No.

[redacted]: As far as I know the investigation is supposed to go on until tomorrow - it sounds like you have more people to speak to, so will it go on beyond then?

Gaby: Yep - I will need to go into next week. I want to be wrapped by next Wednesday, and I'll email Argo with any additional questions that he can discuss with you.

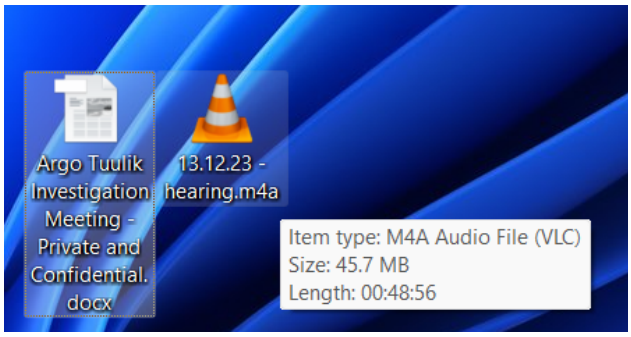
[redacted]: I'm not available after Friday. Argo will not have that representation so we may need to go into the new year.

Argo: with this short timeline, are you sure you have the time to interview all these people?

Gaby: Oh yeah. I have booked myself to the brim. I started last week and wanted to interview as many people as possible.

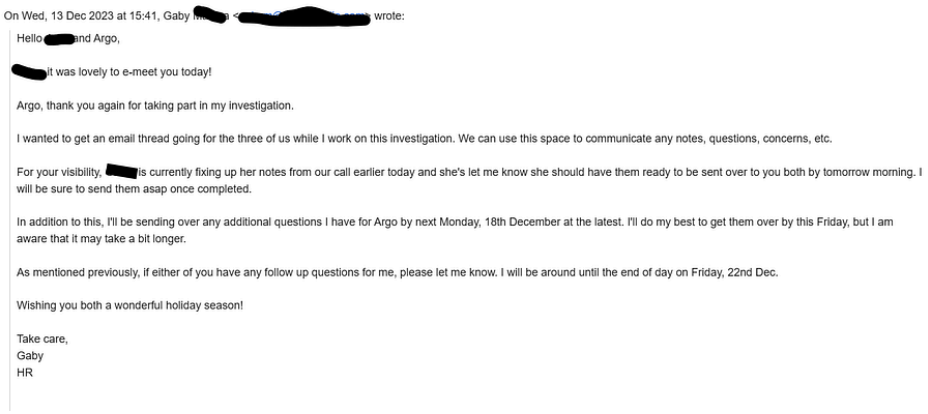
[redacted]: At what point is Argo/anyone else going to hear the conclusions by the end of it?

Gaby: First week of January. Can't come to conclusions until you're both able to speak. I will update all if it gets extended.


Argo Tuulik Investigation Meeting - Private and Confidential.docx
13.12.23 - hearing.m4a
Item type: M4A Audio File (VLC)
Size: 45.7 MB
Length: 00:48:56

After the meeting I sent HR all my chatlogs with Jim and groupchats with Jim and myself in it.

Then Gaby comes back to me…



On Wed, 13 Dec 2023 at 15:41, Gaby [redacted] wrote:

Hello [redacted] and Argo,

[redacted] it was lovely to e-meet you today!

Argo, thank you again for taking part in my investigation.

I wanted to get an email thread going for the three of us while I work on this investigation. We can use this space to communicate any notes, questions, concerns, etc.

For your visibility, [redacted] is currently fixing up her notes from our call earlier today and she's let me know she should have them ready to be sent over to you both by tomorrow morning. I will be sure to send them asap once completed.

In addition to this, I'll be sending over any additional questions I have for Argo by next Monday, 18th December at the latest. I'll do my best to get them over by this Friday, but I am aware that it may take a bit longer.

As mentioned previously, if either of you have any follow up questions for me, please let me know. I will be around until the end of day on Friday, 22nd Dec.

Wishing you both a wonderful holiday season!

Take care,
Gaby
HR

Gaby does send me the notes—the ones above—but never follows up with any additional questions.

A month later, when Tõnis is under investigation— more on that below—I ask my union rep if we should ask how Jim's investigation is going. He says there's no point and we should wait for Zaum's next move.

Argo Tuulik [redacted] Jan 15, 2024, 9:51 PM

to WGGB

Hi [redacted]

Hope you're doing well!

I went over Emma's notes and added some corrections and comments. If you could go over them and give me the green light -- or your suggestions for changes -- I'll send the document back to Emma tomorrow.

If you absolutely feel I shouldn't mention Tõnis's criminal conviction at all I will remove it but I think it would be really good if it was mentioned in the official documents in some shape or form and I felt tying it in with them constantly calling him by his nickname, Denis, would be the most subtle way to go about it.

Also, it's been a while now since there was any mention of Jim's grievance. Do you think we should ask about it? It's kinda weird living with this hanging over our heads, especially as Gaby said she'd wrap up her investigation on the 8th of January.

As always, thank you so much for your help!

Cheers!

Argo

Argo Tuulik <[redacted]> Jan 18, 2024, 5:45 AM

to WGGB

Hi [redacted]

Hope you're doing well!

Thank you for the advice! I won't mention Tõnis's criminal conviction then, but will leave other comments in.

And I guess we'll wait and see what happens with Jim's investigation.

And thanks again! :)

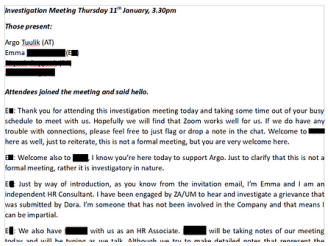
Cheers!

Argo

And that's it. I never hear from this again. **No one ever gets back to me. Not Gaby, not anyone else from HR, not Tõnis, not Jim. There is no resolution, no further mention of the investigation. No closure.** To this day I have no idea what happened, why my friend felt that our working relationship was toxic, why he didn't feel comfortable talking to me about it or what exactly did I do to make him feel this way.

I am interviewed once more on 11th of January due to a *different* grievance, the one filed by Dora, where Tõnis Haavel is being investigated by an "independent" HR company. Independent in a

sense that the same law firm who sends me legal threats about a year later left a blurb on that independent companies page, praising the 'brilliant can-do approach' of the woman who conducts the investigation into Tõnis Haavel's misconduct. London is a small town and there's only so many law-firms and independent HR outfits to go around. Some are bound to overlap. It's a coincidence and nothing more. Don't even bother asking "what are the odds?". They are easily calculable.



Investigation Meeting Thursday 11th January, 3.30pm

Those present:

Argo Tuulik (AT)
Emma [redacted] (E)
[redacted]

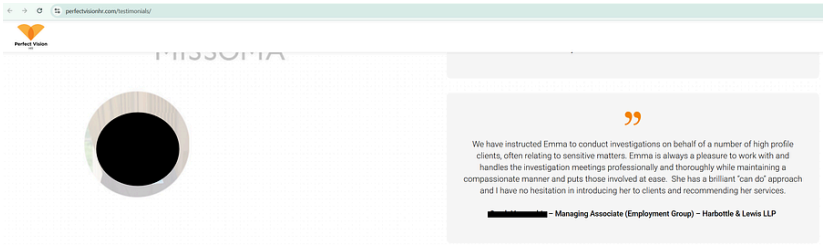
Attendees joined the meeting and said hello.

E: Thank you for attending this investigation meeting today and taking some time out of your busy schedule to meet with us. Hopefully we will find that Zoom works well for us. If we do have any trouble with connections, please feel free to just flag or drop a note in the chat. Welcome to [redacted] here as well, just to reiterate, this is not a formal meeting, but you are very welcome here.

E: Welcome also to [redacted]. I know you're here today to support Argo. Just to clarify that this is not a formal meeting, rather it is investigatory in nature.

E: Just by way of introduction, as you know from the invitation email, I'm Emma and I am an independent HR Consultant. I have been engaged by ZA/UM to hear and investigate a grievance that was submitted by Dora. I'm someone that has not been involved in the Company and that means I can be impartial.

E: We also have [redacted] with us as an HR Associate. [redacted] will be taking notes of our meeting


perfectvisionhr.com/testimonials/
Perfect Vision
MISSION
We have instructed Emma to conduct investigations on behalf of a number of high profile clients, often relating to sensitive matters. Emma is always a pleasure to work with and handles the investigation meetings professionally and thoroughly while maintaining a compassionate manner and puts those involved at ease. She has a brilliant "can do" approach and I have no hesitation in introducing her to clients and recommending her services.
[redacted] – Managing Associate (Employment Group) – Harbottle & Lewis LLP

Harbottle & Lewis

[redacted]

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL
ADDRESSEE ONLY

Argo Tuulik
[redacted]
London
[redacted]
United Kingdom

BY FIRST CLASS POST AND BY EMAIL TO [redacted]

10 October 2024

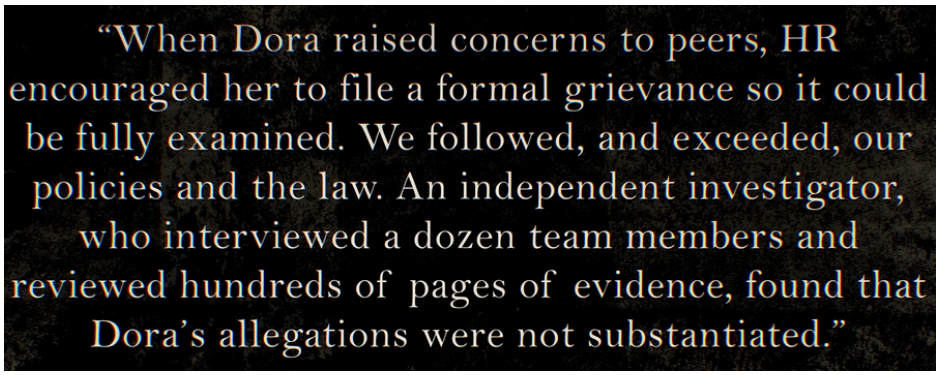
Dear Argo Tuulik

Zaum Studio Limited (formerly known as Disco Elysium UK Limited)
Breach of Contract, Breach of Confidentiality and Copyright Infringement

We are lawyers instructed by Zaum Studio Limited (**Company**), formerly known as Disco Elysium UK Limited.

This letter sets out our client's legal complaints against you and requires you to respond by the deadline set out in bold below. We strongly recommend you seek independent legal advice, and you may wish to instruct a solicitor to act for you. If you do, you should give this letter to them immediately and draw their attention to the deadline set out at the bottom of this letter.

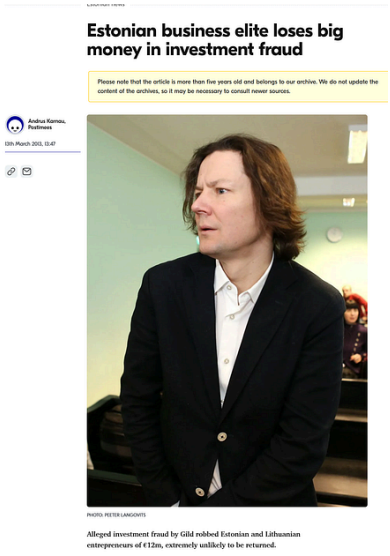
The independent HR company Zaum studio hires to investigate the **father of the son of CEO Ilmar Kompus' wife's sister, Chief Production Officer Tõnis Haavel** finds him—wait for it—not-guilty. I know, I'm as shocked as you are. It's crazy to think that way but it's almost like companies don't want to pay money for someone to say that their guys are in the wrong. Crazy!


"When Dora raised concerns to peers, HR encouraged her to file a formal grievance so it could be fully examined. We followed, and exceeded, our policies and the law. An independent investigator, who interviewed a dozen team members and reviewed hundreds of pages of evidence, found that Dora's allegations were not substantiated."

'Exceeded' as in 'did not abide by'?

Dora will talk more about it in her own post. Before she can appeal the independent HR companies' 'not guilty' conclusion to the investigation into **convicted financial criminal Tõnis Haavel**, Zaum's management rushes to cancel project X7 where incidentally 90% of

the witnesses listed in Dora's grievance are working. That's probably a coincidence as well.



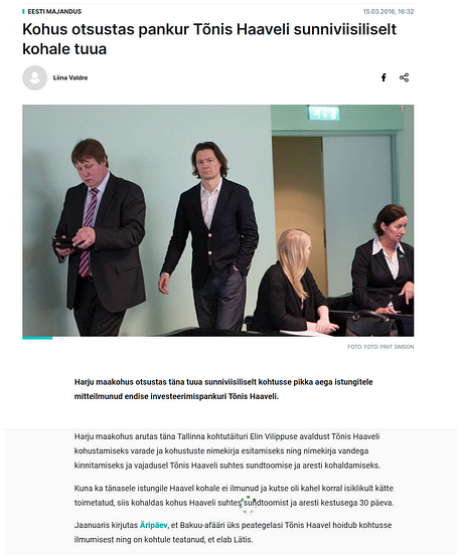
Estonian business elite loses big money in investment fraud

Please note that the article is more than five years old and belongs to our archive. We do not update the content of the archives, so it may be necessary to consult newer sources.

Andrus Kornau, Postimees
13th March 2013, 13:47

PHOTO: PEETER LANGOVITS

Alleged investment fraud by Gild robbed Estonian and Lithuanian entrepreneurs of €12m, extremely unlikely to be returned.



EESTI MAJANDUS 15.03.2016, 16:32

Kohus otsustas pankur Tõnis Haaveli sunniviisiliselt kohale tuua

Liina Valdre

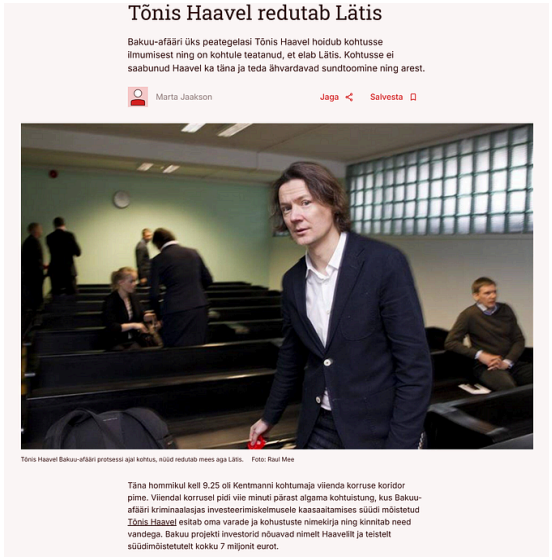
FOTO: FOTO: PRIIT SIMSON

Harju maakohus otsustas täna tuua sunniviisiliselt kohtusse pikka aega istungitele mitteilmunud endise investeerimispankuri Tõnis Haaveli.

Harju maakohus arutas täna Tallinna kohtutäituri Elin Vilippuse avaldust Tõnis Haaveli kohustamiseks varade ja kohustuste nimekirja esitamiseks ning nimekirja vandega kinnitamiseks ja vajadusel Tõnis Haaveli suhtes sundtoomise ja aresti kohaldamiseks.

Kuna ka tänasele istungile Haavel kohale ei ilmunud ja kutse oli kahel korral isiklikult kätte toimetatud, siis kohaldas kohus Haaveli suhtes sundtoomist ja aresti kestusega 30 päeva.

Jaanuaris kirjutas Äripäev, et Bakuu-afääri üks peategelasi Tõnis Haavel hoidub kohtusse ilmumisest ning on kohtule teatanud, et elab Lätis.



Tõnis Haavel redutab Lätis

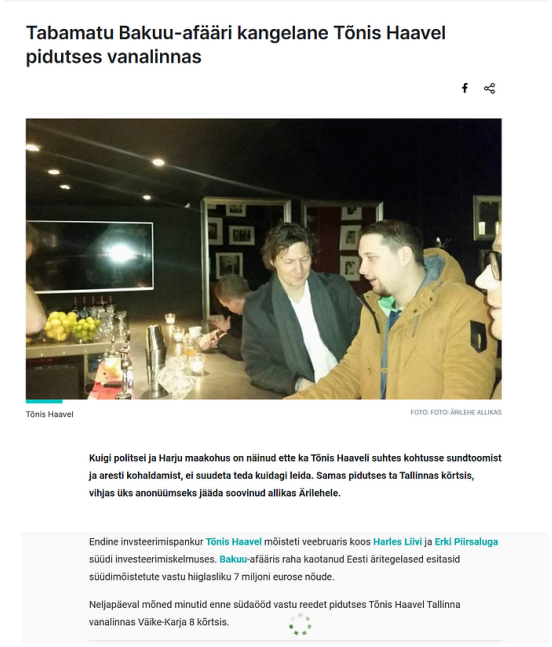
Bakuu-afääri üks peategelasi Tõnis Haavel hoidub kohtusse ilmumisest ning on kohtule teatanud, et elab Lätis. Kohtusse ei saabunud Haavel ka täna ja teda ähvardavad sundtoomine ning arest.

Marta Jaakson Jaga Salvesta

Tõnis Haavel Bakuu-afääri protsessi ajal kohtus, nüüd redutab mees aga Lätis. Foto: Raul Mee

Täna hommikul kell 9.25 oli Kentmanni kohtumaja viienda korruse koridor pime. Viiendal korrusel pidi viie minuti pärast algama kohtuistung, kus Bakuu-afääri kriminaalasjas investeerimiskelmusele kaasaaitamises süüdi mõistetud Tõnis Haavel esitab oma varade ja kohustuste nimekirja ning kinnitab need vandega. Bakuu projekti investorid nõuavad nimelt Haavelilt ja teistelt süüdimõistetutelt kokku 7 miljonit eurot.

Tõnis Haavel, Harles Liiv ja Erki Piirsalu Bakuu-afääri istungil Harju maakohtus. Foto: Andras Kralla



Tabamatu Bakuu-afääri kangelane Tõnis Haavel pidutses vanalinnas

Tõnis Haavel FOTO: FOTO: ÄRILEHE ALLIKAS

Kuigi politsei ja Harju maakohus on näinud ette ka Tõnis Haaveli suhtes kohtusse sundtoomist ja aresti kohaldamist, ei suudeta teda kuidagi leida. Samas pidutses ta Tallinnas kõrtsis, vihjas üks anonüümseks jääda soovinud allikas Ärilehele.

Endine invsteerimispankur Tõnis Haavel mõisteti veebruaris koos Harles Liivi ja Erki Piirsaluga süüdi investeerimiskelmuses. Bakuu-afääris raha kaotanud Eesti äritegelased esitasid süüdimõistetute vastu hiiglasliku 7 miljoni eurose nõude.

Neljapäeval mõned minutid enne südaööd vastu reedet pidutses Tõnis Haavel Tallinna vanalinnas Väike-Karja 8 kõrtsis.

Majandus

Kõik uudised | Eesti majandus | Välismajandus

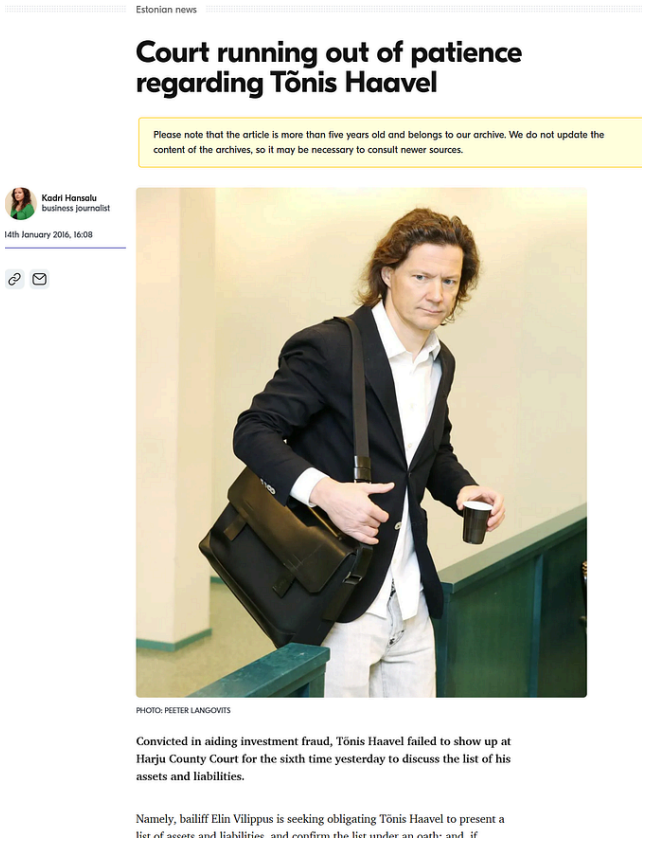
EESTI MAJANDUS 13.05.2016, 17:15

Pankrotistunud Tõnis Haavel pääses arestist ja sundtoomisest

Toimetas: **Kadri Paas**

Tõnis Haavel FOTO: FOTO: ANNIKA HAAS

Kuna Tõnis Haavelile kuulutati Lätis välja pankrot, tühistas ringkonnakohus Harju maakohtu määruse talle aresti ja kohtusse sundtoomise kohaldamiseks.



Estonian news

Court running out of patience regarding Tõnis Haavel

Please note that the article is more than five years old and belongs to our archive. We do not update the content of the archives, so it may be necessary to consult newer sources.

Kadri Hansalu
business journalist
14th January 2016, 16:08

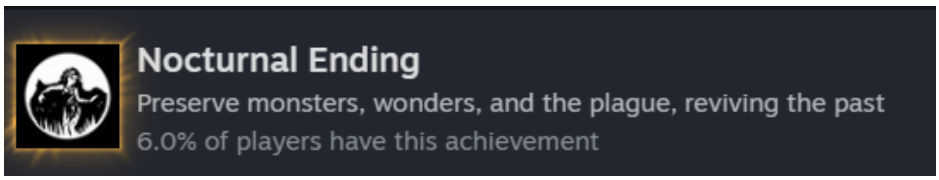
PHOTO: PEETER LANGOVITS

Convicted in aiding investment fraud, Tõnis Haavel failed to show up at Harju County Court for the sixth time yesterday to discuss the list of his assets and liabilities.

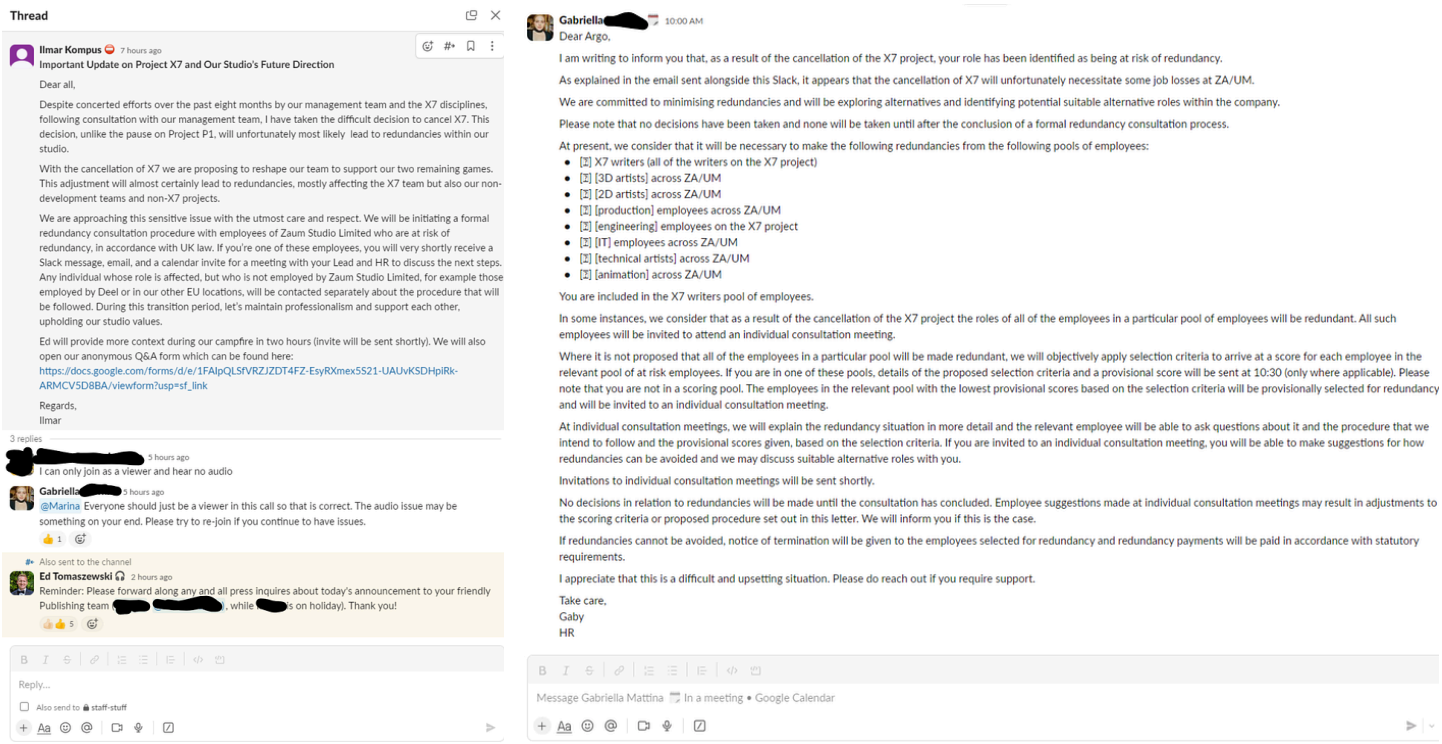
Namely, bailiff Elin Vilippus is seeking obligating Tõnis Haavel to present a list of assets and liabilities, and confirm the list under an oath; and, if

"Tõnis Haavel? Oh no, I'm *Denis Havel* — a completely different person. But I hear that Tõnis Haavel-guy took a fall in Baku. Sacrificed himself to save others. He's honorable like that, at least that's what I hear."

I have never struggled more wrapping up a piece of writing cause there's so much more I want to include but I feel this section of the article is already comparable to Steam-achievements of Pathologic 2...

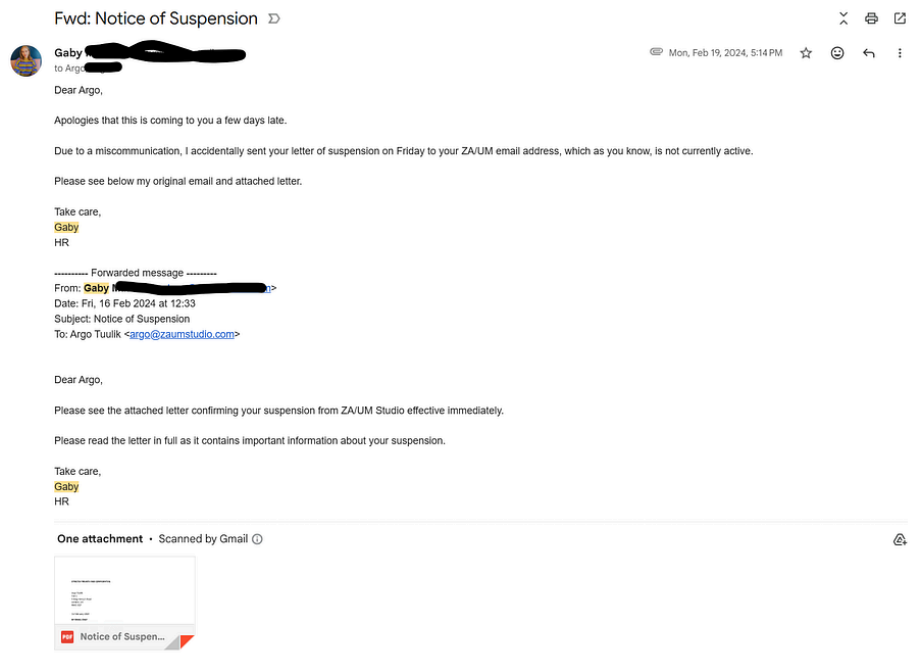


So let's wrap it. In February 2024 Zaum cancels X7 and announces redundancies in the studio.


Thread
Ilmar Kompus 7 hours ago
Important Update on Project X7 and Our Studio's Future Direction
Dear all,
Despite concerted efforts over the past eight months by our management team and the X7 disciplines, following consultation with our management team, I have taken the difficult decision to cancel X7. This decision, unlike the pause on Project P1, will unfortunately most likely lead to redundancies within our studio.
With the cancellation of X7 we are proposing to reshape our team to support our two remaining games. This adjustment will almost certainly lead to redundancies, mostly affecting the X7 team but also our non-development teams and non-X7 projects.
We are approaching this sensitive issue with the utmost care and respect. We will be initiating a formal redundancy consultation procedure with employees of Zaum Studio Limited who are at risk of redundancy, in accordance with UK law. If you're one of these employees, you will very shortly receive a Slack message, email, and a calendar invite for a meeting with your Lead and HR to discuss the next steps. Any individual whose role is affected, but who is not employed by Zaum Studio Limited, for example those employed by Deel or in our other EU locations, will be contacted separately about the procedure that will be followed. During this transition period, let's maintain professionalism and support each other, upholding our studio values.
Ed will provide more context during our campfire in two hours (invite will be sent shortly). We will also open our anonymous Q&A form which can be found here:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfVRZJZDT4FZ-EsyRXmex5S21-UAUvKSDHpIRk-ARMCV5D8BA/viewform?usp=sf_link
Regards,
Ilmar
3 replies
3 hours ago
I can only join as a viewer and hear no audio
5 hours ago
@Marina Everyone should just be a viewer in this call so that is correct. The audio issue may be something on your end. Please try to re-join if you continue to have issues.
Also sent to the channel
Ed Tomaszewski 2 hours ago
Reminder: Please forward along any and all press inquires about today's announcement to your friendly Publishing team, while s on holiday). Thank you!
Reply...
Also send to staff-stuff
Gabriella 10:00 AM
Dear Argo,
I am writing to inform you that, as a result of the cancellation of the X7 project, your role has been identified as being at risk of redundancy.
As explained in the email sent alongside this Slack, it appears that the cancellation of X7 will unfortunately necessitate some job losses at ZA/UM.
We are committed to minimising redundancies and will be exploring alternatives and identifying potential suitable alternative roles within the company.
Please note that no decisions have been taken and none will be taken until after the conclusion of a formal redundancy consultation process.
At present, we consider that it will be necessary to make the following redundancies from the following pools of employees:
[X] X7 writers (all of the writers on the X7 project)
[X] [3D artists] across ZA/UM
[X] [2D artists] across ZA/UM
[X] [production] employees across ZA/UM
[X] [engineering] employees on the X7 project
[X] [IT] employees across ZA/UM
[X] [technical artists] across ZA/UM
[X] [animation] across ZA/UM
You are included in the X7 writers pool of employees.
In some instances, we consider that as a result of the cancellation of the X7 project the roles of all of the employees in a particular pool of employees will be redundant. All such employees will be invited to attend an individual consultation meeting.
Where it is not proposed that all of the employees in a particular pool will be made redundant, we will objectively apply selection criteria to arrive at a score for each employee in the relevant pool of at risk employees. If you are in one of these pools, details of the proposed selection criteria and a provisional score will be sent at 10:30 (only where applicable). Please note that you are not in a scoring pool. The employees in the relevant pool with the lowest provisional scores based on the selection criteria will be provisionally selected for redundancy and will be invited to an individual consultation meeting.
At individual consultation meetings, we will explain the redundancy situation in more detail and the relevant employee will be able to ask questions about it and the procedure that we intend to follow and the provisional scores given, based on the selection criteria. If you are invited to an individual consultation meeting, you will be able to make suggestions for how redundancies can be avoided and we may discuss suitable alternative roles with you.
Invitations to individual consultation meetings will be sent shortly.
No decisions in relation to redundancies will be made until the consultation has concluded. Employee suggestions made at individual consultation meetings may result in adjustments to the scoring criteria or proposed procedure set out in this letter. We will inform you if this is the case.
If redundancies cannot be avoided, notice of termination will be given to the employees selected for redundancy and redundancy payments will be paid in accordance with statutory requirements.
I appreciate that this is a difficult and upsetting situation. Please do reach out if you require support.
Take care,
Gaby
HR
Message Gabriella Mattina In a meeting • Google Calendar

An hour after the redundancy announcement all-hands zoom call where for the very first time in the studio's history everyone's microphones are disabled, I get an email from a journalist asking me if I want to comment on the redundancies. I do, I really *really* do.

This results in me being locked out of all of Zaum's systems an hour after the article airs. A few days later I get this email from HR.



Fwd: Notice of Suspension

Gaby [redacted]
to Argo [redacted]
Mon, Feb 19, 2024, 5:14 PM

Dear Argo,

Apologies that this is coming to you a few days late.

Due to a miscommunication, I accidentally sent your letter of suspension on Friday to your ZA/UM email address, which as you know, is not currently active.

Please see below my original email and attached letter.

Take care,
Gaby
HR

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: Gaby H[redacted]
Date: Fri, 16 Feb 2024 at 12:33
Subject: Notice of Suspension
To: Argo Tuulik <argo@zaumstudio.com>

Dear Argo,

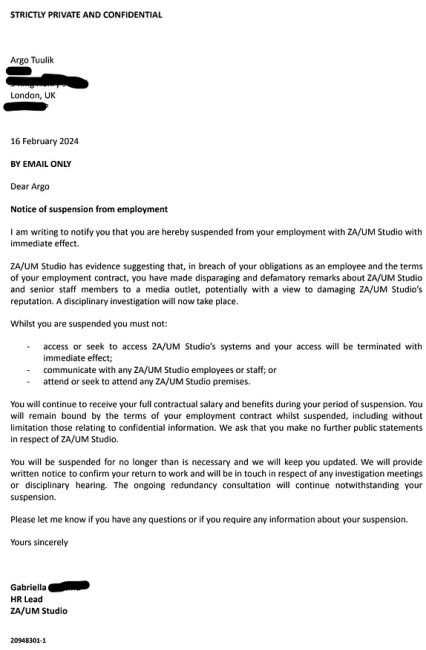
Please see the attached letter confirming your suspension from ZA/UM Studio effective immediately.

Please read the letter in full as it contains important information about your suspension.

Take care,
Gaby
HR

One attachment • Scanned by Gmail

Notice of Suspen...



STRICTLY PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Argo Tuulik
[redacted]
London, UK

16 February 2024

BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Argo

Notice of suspension from employment

I am writing to notify you that you are hereby suspended from your employment with ZA/UM Studio with immediate effect.

ZA/UM Studio has evidence suggesting that, in breach of your obligations as an employee and the terms of your employment contract, you have made disparaging and defamatory remarks about ZA/UM Studio and senior staff members to a media outlet, potentially with a view to damaging ZA/UM Studio's reputation. A disciplinary investigation will now take place.

Whilst you are suspended you must not:

- access or seek to access ZA/UM Studio's systems and your access will be terminated with immediate effect;
- communicate with any ZA/UM Studio employees or staff; or
- attend or seek to attend any ZA/UM Studio premises.

You will continue to receive your full contractual salary and benefits during your period of suspension. You will remain bound by the terms of your employment contract whilst suspended, including without limitation those relating to confidential information. We ask that you make no further public statements in respect of ZA/UM Studio.

You will be suspended for no longer than is necessary and we will keep you updated. We will provide written notice to confirm your return to work and will be in touch in respect of any investigation meetings or disciplinary hearing. The ongoing redundancy consultation will continue notwithstanding your suspension.

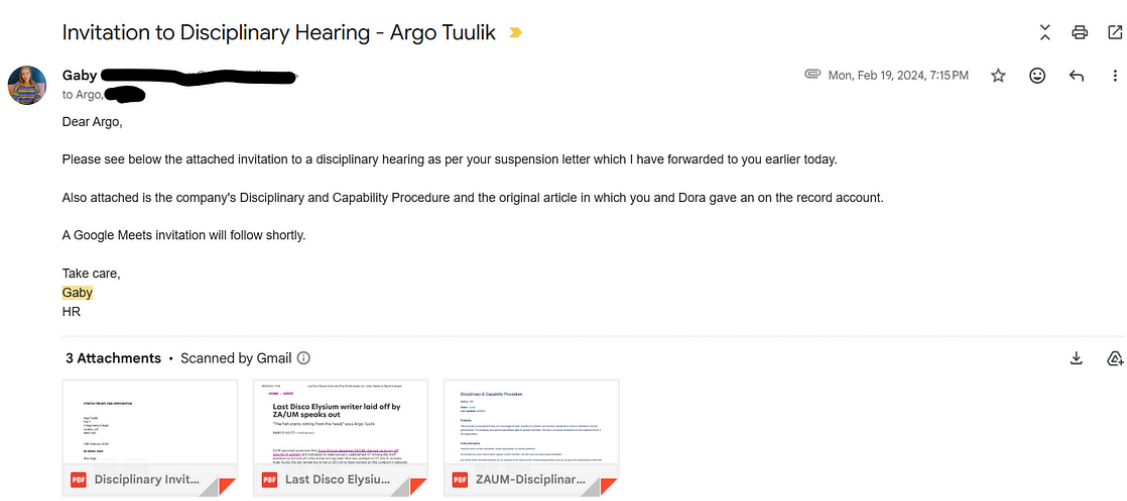
Please let me know if you have any questions or if you require any information about your suspension.

Yours sincerely

Gabriella [redacted]
HR Lead
ZA/UM Studio

20948301-1

And two hours later, this:



Invitation to Disciplinary Hearing - Argo Tuulik

Gaby [redacted]
to Argo, [redacted]
Mon, Feb 19, 2024, 7:15 PM

Dear Argo,

Please see below the attached invitation to a disciplinary hearing as per your suspension letter which I have forwarded to you earlier today.

Also attached is the company's Disciplinary and Capability Procedure and the original article in which you and Dora gave an on the record account.

A Google Meets invitation will follow shortly.

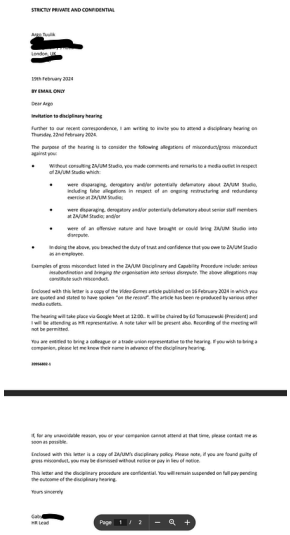
Take care,
Gaby
HR

3 Attachments • Scanned by Gmail

Disciplinary Invit...

Last Disco Elysiu...

ZAUM-Disciplinar...



STRICTLY PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Argo Tuulik
[redacted]
London, UK

19th February 2024

BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Argo

Invitation to disciplinary hearing

Further to our recent correspondence, I am writing to invite you to attend a disciplinary hearing on Thursday, 22nd February 2024.

The purpose of the hearing is to consider the following allegations of misconduct/gross misconduct against you:

- Without consulting ZA/UM Studio, you made comments and remarks to a media outlet in respect of ZA/UM Studio which:
  - were disparaging, derogatory and/or potentially defamatory about ZA/UM Studio, including false allegations in respect of an ongoing restructuring and redundancy exercise at ZA/UM Studio;
  - were disparaging, derogatory and/or potentially defamatory about senior staff members at ZA/UM Studio; and/or
  - were of an offensive nature and have brought or could bring ZA/UM Studio into disrepute.
- In doing the above, you breached the duty of trust and confidence that you owe to ZA/UM Studio as an employee.

Examples of gross misconduct listed in the ZA/UM Disciplinary and Capability Procedure include: serious misadministration and bringing the organisation into serious disrepute. The above allegations may constitute such misconduct.

Enclosed with this letter is a copy of the Vidro Gomez article published on 16 February 2024 in which you are quoted and stated to have spoken "on the record". The article has been re-produced by various other media outlets.

The hearing will take place via Google Meet at 12:00.. It will be chaired by Ed Tomaszewski (President) and I will be attending as HR representative. A note taker will be present also. Recording of the meeting will not be permitted.

You are entitled to bring a colleague or a trade union representative to the hearing. If you wish to bring a companion, please let me know their name in advance of the disciplinary hearing.

20948301-1

If, for any unavoidable reason, you or your companion cannot attend at that time, please contact me as soon as possible.

Enclosed with this letter is a copy of ZA/UM's disciplinary policy. Please note, if you are found guilty of gross misconduct, you may be dismissed without notice or pay in lieu of notice.

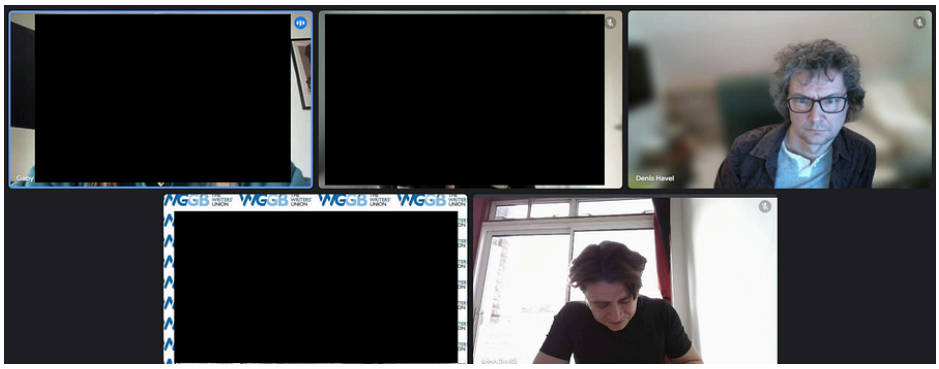
This letter and the disciplinary procedure are confidential. You will remain suspended on full pay pending the outcome of the disciplinary hearing.

Yours sincerely

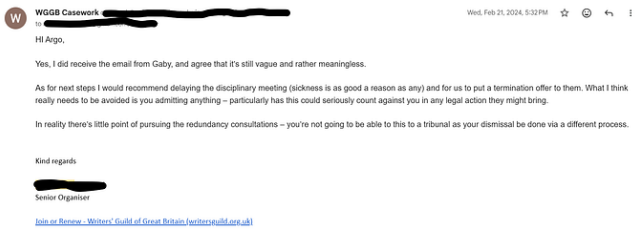
[redacted]
HR Lead

Page 1 / 2

I still attend a redundancy meeting the following week and it's kind of hilarious. My trade union representative tears Tõnis Haavel a new one. The redundancy process is conducted so poorly I could almost certainly contest it. But there's no real point to it since they're gonna fire me for talking to the press (gross misconduct) anyways.



So on the advice of my trade union rep—bless the man, he was the real unsung hero of the story, amazing guy—I resign from my Principal Writer position in Zaum Studio on the 26th of February 2024.



WGGB Casework [redacted] Wed, Feb 21, 2024, 5:32 PM

to [redacted]

HI Argo,

Yes, I did receive the email from Gaby, and agree that it's still vague and rather meaningless.

As for next steps I would recommend delaying the disciplinary meeting (sickness is as good a reason as any) and for us to put a termination offer to them. What I think really needs to be avoided is you admitting anything – particularly has this could seriously count against you in any legal action they might bring.

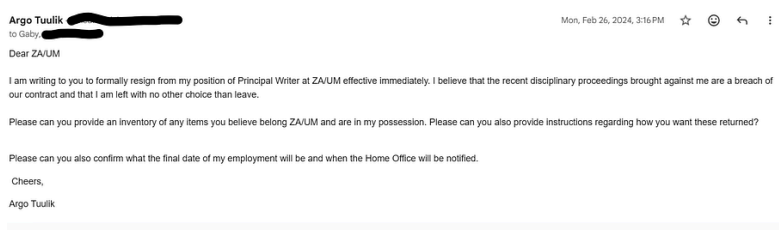
In reality there's little point of pursuing the redundancy consultations – you're not going to be able to this to a tribunal as your dismissal be done via a different process.

Kind regards

[redacted]

Senior Organiser

Join or Renew - Writers' Guild of Great Britain (writersguild.org.uk)



Argo Tuulik [redacted] Mon, Feb 26, 2024, 3:16 PM

to Gaby, [redacted]

Dear ZA/UM

I am writing to you to formally resign from my position of Principal Writer at ZA/UM effective immediately. I believe that the recent disciplinary proceedings brought against me are a breach of our contract and that I am left with no other choice than leave.

Please can you provide an inventory of any items you believe belong ZA/UM and are in my possession. Please can you also provide instructions regarding how you want these returned?

Please can you also confirm what the final date of my employment will be and when the Home Office will be notified.

Cheers,

Argo Tuulik

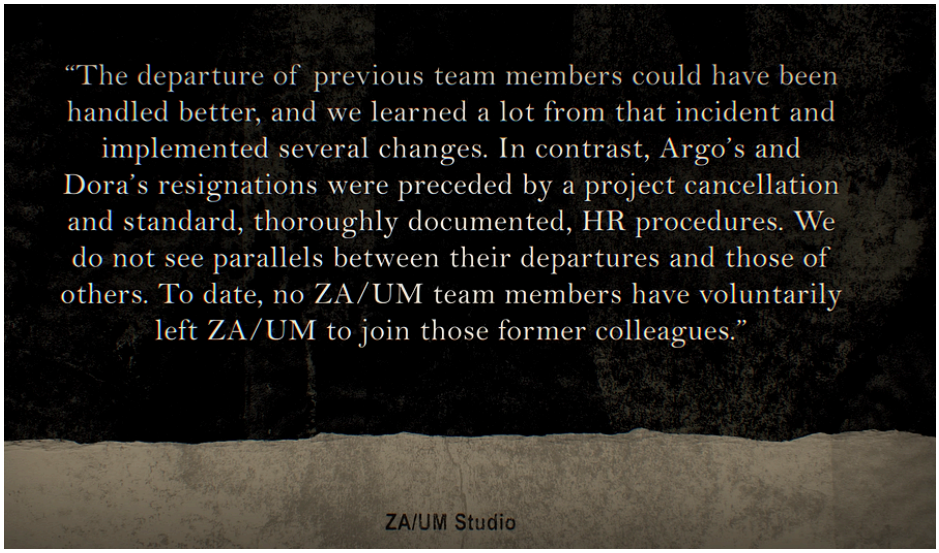
Roll credits!

Despite spending so long writing this document that in the meantime C4's trailer aired and I can now call it "Zero Parades" (it's what you get when you type "No Truce" into Wish.com search bar), I have only skimmed the very surface of the clownshoe that is later-day Zaum. The redundancy process alone would could cover another twenty pages. And there is *so* much more. Some we covered in an episode(s) of Human Can Opener with Precinct 41.

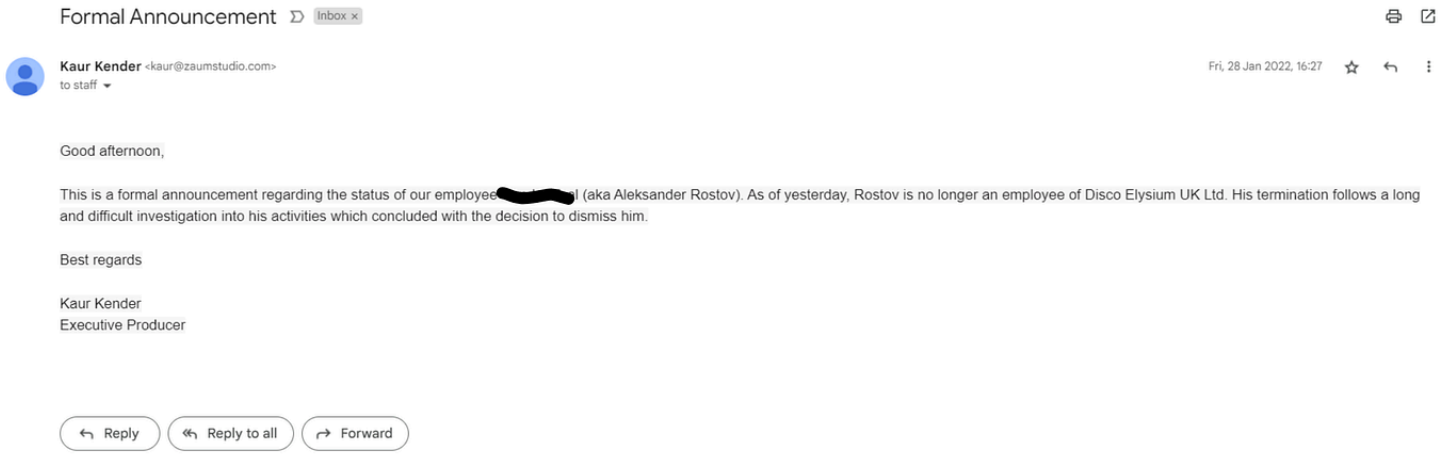
The thing is I don't really want to think about Zaum any more. Sure, the comedic value of its endless failures is undeniable—god even Geoff Keighley couldn't say anything nice about the studio when ushering in the trailer—but the sad reality is that there are still people working there. Good people. People who for one reason or

another can't leave. And I may hate the grotesque parody of an art collective my home-studio became but I remember all too well what it was like to work there when everybody in the world hates you. And that's not very funny.

In the end I want to leave you with this…


"The departure of previous team members could have been handled better, and we learned a lot from that incident and implemented several changes. In contrast, Argo's and Dora's resignations were preceded by a project cancellation and standard, thoroughly documented, HR procedures. We do not see parallels between their departures and those of others. To date, no ZA/UM team members have voluntarily left ZA/UM to join those former colleagues."
ZA/UM Studio

The last sentence is a lie by the way. But even if it was true, what an insane thing to brag about in a public statement.


Formal Announcement Inbox ×

Kaur Kender <kaur@zaumstudio.com>
to staff

Fri, 28 Jan 2022, 16:27

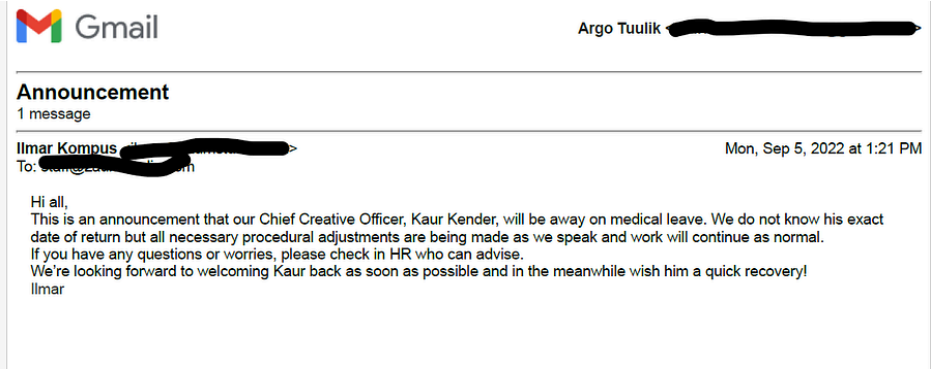
Good afternoon,

This is a formal announcement regarding the status of our employee [redacted] (aka Aleksander Rostov). As of yesterday, Rostov is no longer an employee of Disco Elysium UK Ltd. His termination follows a long and difficult investigation into his activities which concluded with the decision to dismiss him.

Best regards

Kaur Kender
Executive Producer

Reply Reply to all Forward

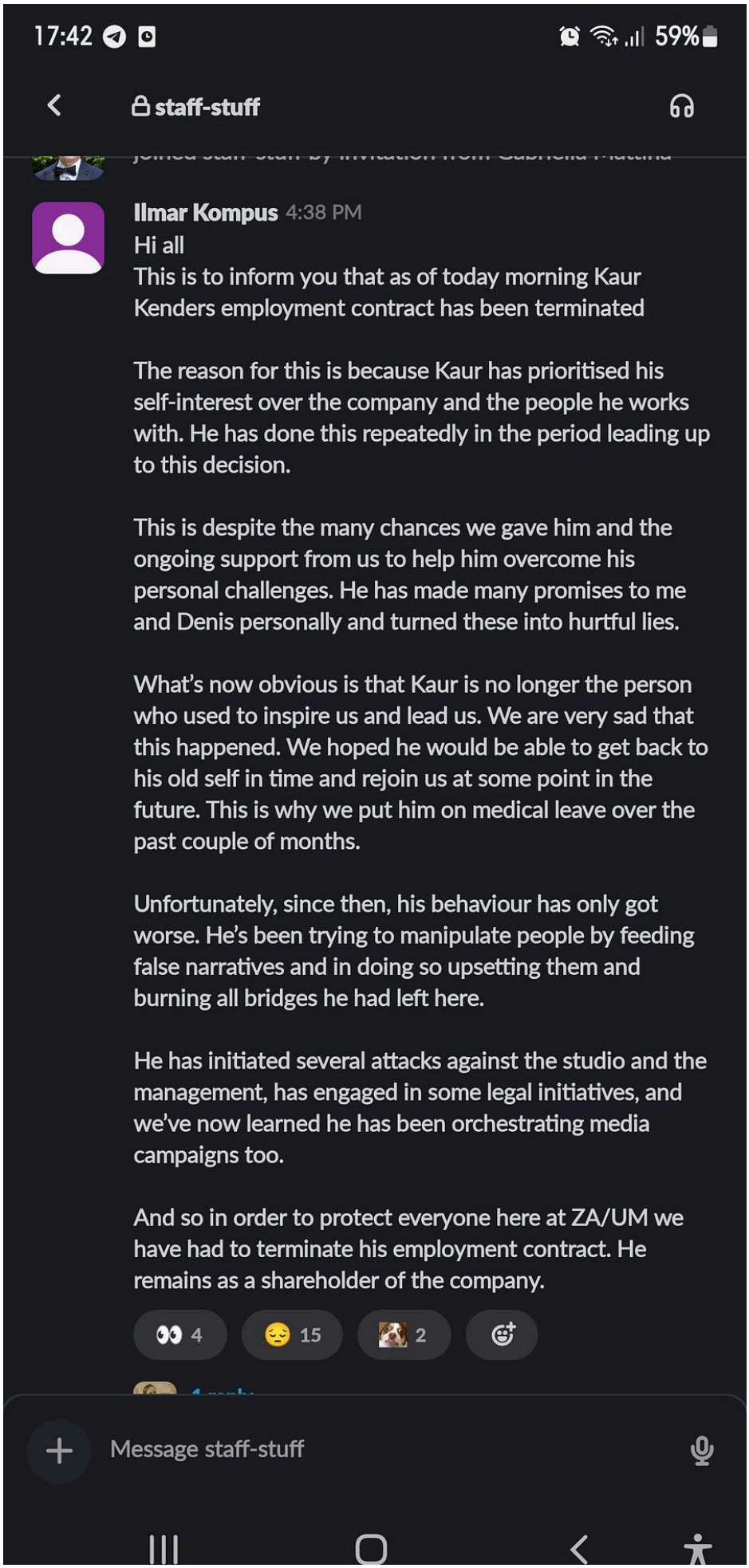


Gmail Argo Tuulik [redacted]

Announcement
1 message

Ilmar Kompus [redacted] Mon, Sep 5, 2022 at 1:21 PM
To: [redacted]

Hi all,
This is an announcement that our Chief Creative Officer, Kaur Kender, will be away on medical leave. We do not know his exact date of return but all necessary procedural adjustments are being made as we speak and work will continue as normal.
If you have any questions or worries, please check in HR who can advise.
We're looking forward to welcoming Kaur back as soon as possible and in the meanwhile wish him a quick recovery!
Ilmar


17:42
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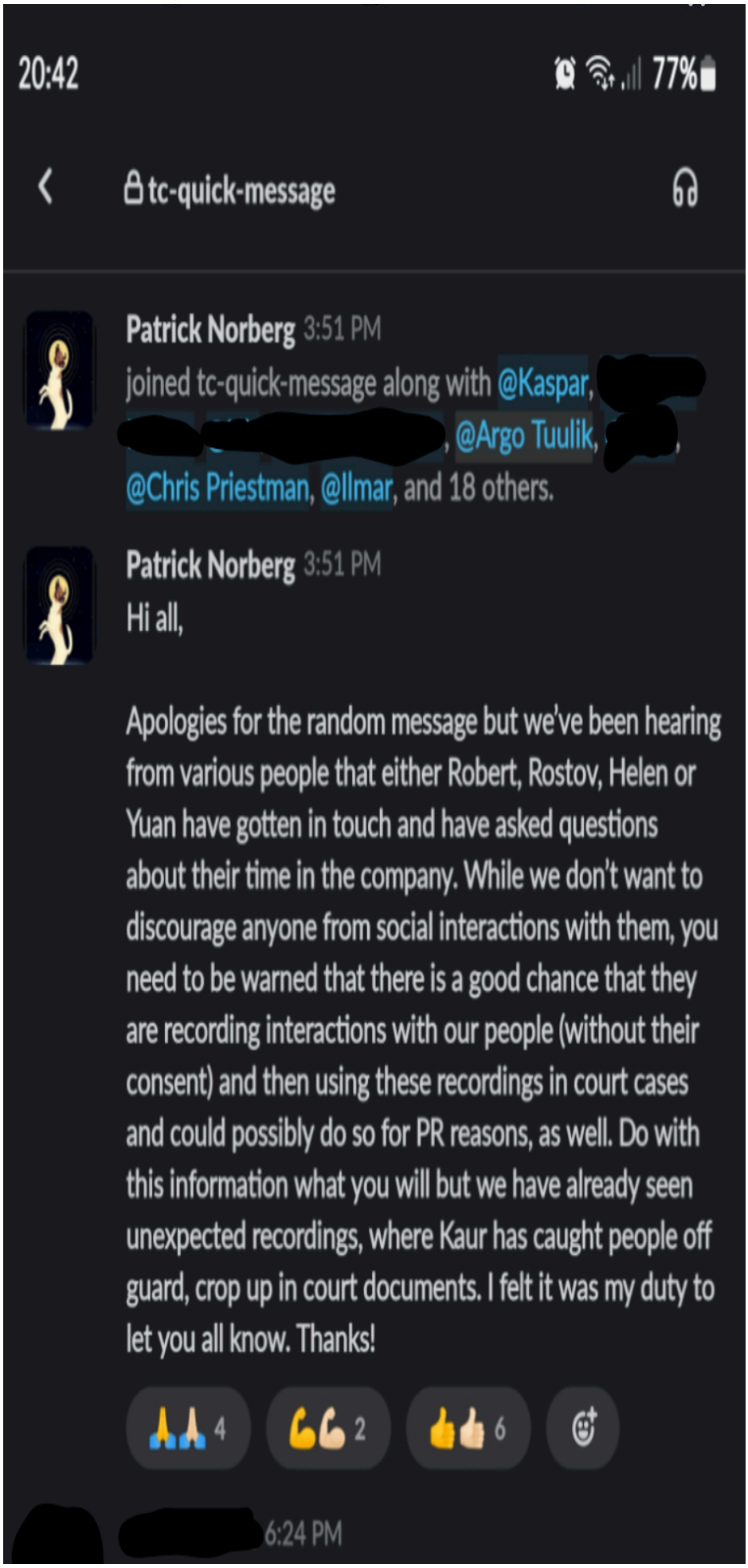
staff-stuff
Ilmar Kompus 4:38 PM
Hi all
This is to inform you that as of today morning Kaur Kenders employment contract has been terminated
The reason for this is because Kaur has prioritised his self-interest over the company and the people he works with. He has done this repeatedly in the period leading up to this decision.
This is despite the many chances we gave him and the ongoing support from us to help him overcome his personal challenges. He has made many promises to me and Denis personally and turned these into hurtful lies.
What's now obvious is that Kaur is no longer the person who used to inspire us and lead us. We are very sad that this happened. We hoped he would be able to get back to his old self in time and rejoin us at some point in the future. This is why we put him on medical leave over the past couple of months.
Unfortunately, since then, his behaviour has only got worse. He's been trying to manipulate people by feeding false narratives and in doing so upsetting them and burning all bridges he had left here.
He has initiated several attacks against the studio and the management, has engaged in some legal initiatives, and we've now learned he has been orchestrating media campaigns too.
And so in order to protect everyone here at ZA/UM we have had to terminate his employment contract. He remains as a shareholder of the company.
4
15
2
Message staff-stuff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tc-quick-message
Patrick Norberg 3:51 PM
joined tc-quick-message along with @Kaspar, [redacted], @Argo Tuulik, [redacted], @Chris Priestman, @Ilmar, and 18 others.
Patrick Norberg 3:51 PM
Hi all,
Apologies for the random message but we've been hearing from various people that either Robert, Rostov, Helen or Yuan have gotten in touch and have asked questions about their time in the company. While we don't want to discourage anyone from social interactions with them, you need to be warned that there is a good chance that they are recording interactions with our people (without their consent) and then using these recordings in court cases and could possibly do so for PR reasons, as well. Do with this information what you will but we have already seen unexpected recordings, where Kaur has caught people off guard, crop up in court documents. I felt it was my duty to let you all know. Thanks!
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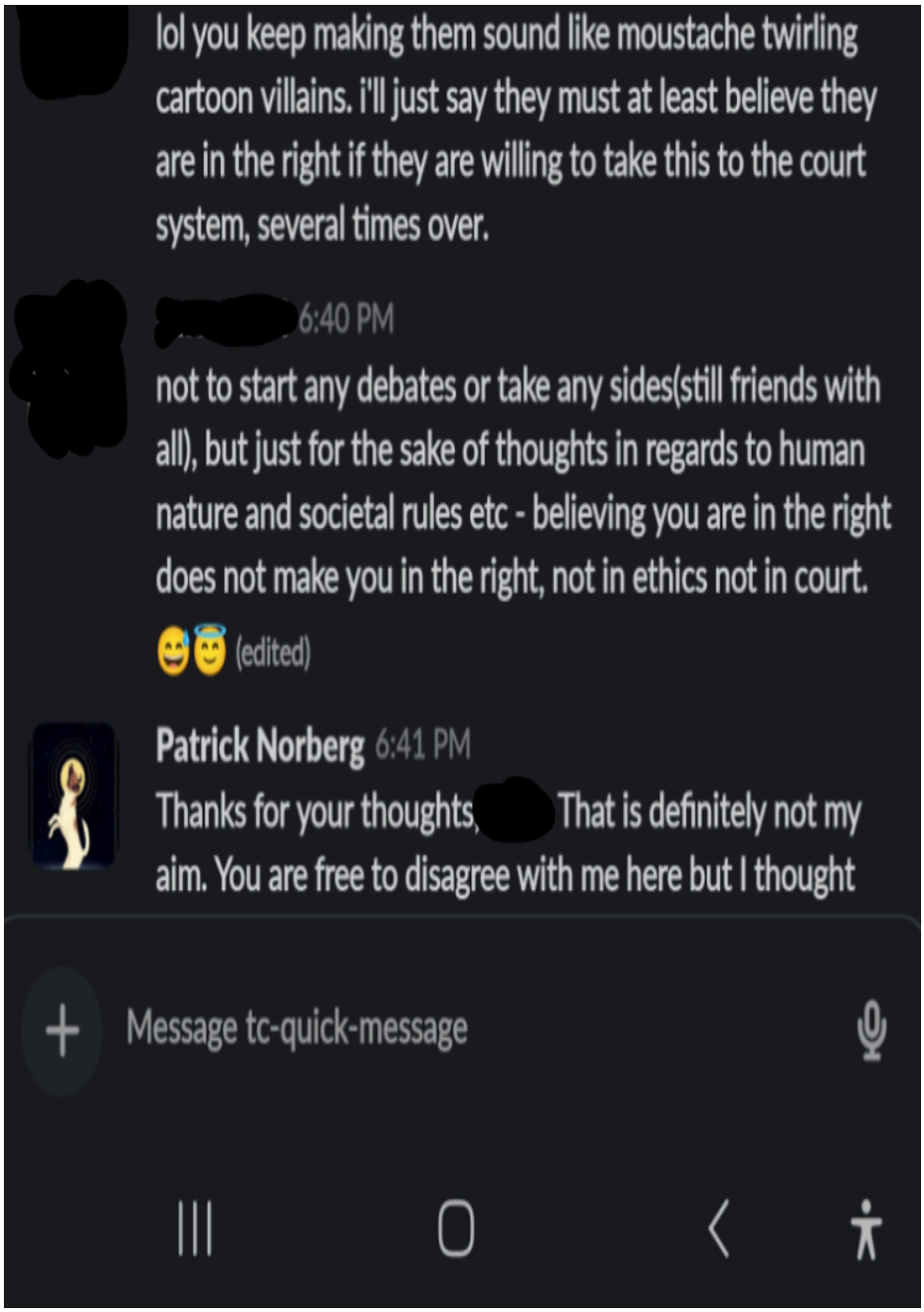
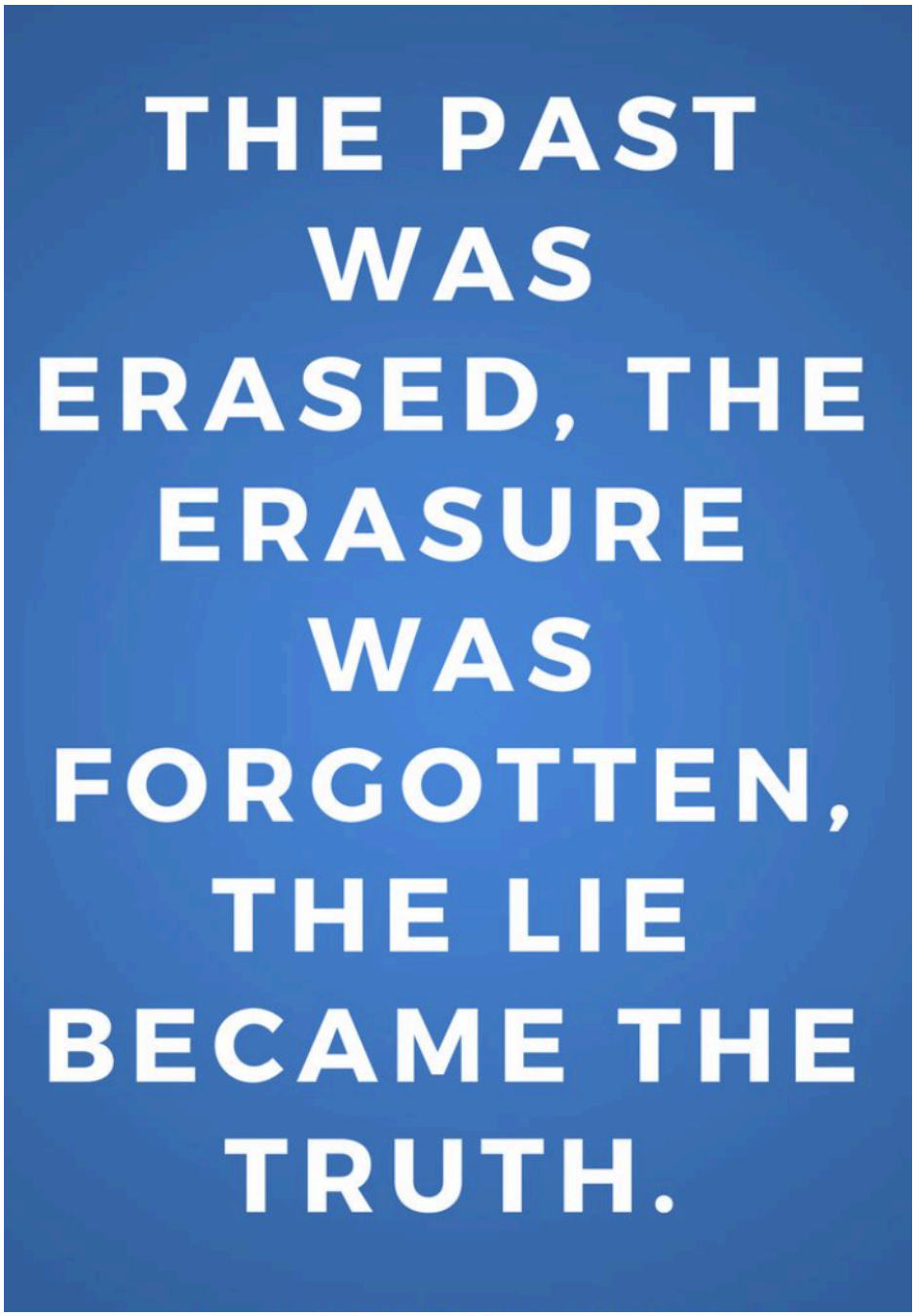
6
[redacted] 6:24 PM


lol you keep making them sound like moustache twirling cartoon villains. i'll just say they must at least believe they are in the right if they are willing to take this to the court system, several times over.
6:40 PM
not to start any debates or take any sides(still friends with all), but just for the sake of thoughts in regards to human nature and societal rules etc - believing you are in the right does not make you in the right, not in ethics not in court.
(edited)
Patrick Norberg 6:41 PM
Thanks for your thoughts, That is definitely not my aim. You are free to disagree with me here but I thought
Message tc-quick-message



George Orwell "1984"

Till the next time.

Arx out.

PS. I highly recommend reading Dora's response to Zaum's defamation as well.

PPS. Zaum, I would like to end this matter here. You do you, I go my way. However if you keep trying to tarnish my reputation with baseless allegations you leave me no other choice than to showcase the evidence I collected (audio, video, etc) to protect myself against *exactly* this kind of defamation, in it's entirety. Let's drop hands and walk away.